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# I am a Lifer: An ethnographic study of the impact of long-term incarceration on Lifers' identity.

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# I AM A LIFER:
An Ethnographic Study of the impact
of long-term incarceration on Lifers' identity



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- General 0679
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- General 0401
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- Medieval 0297
- Modern 0298
- African 0316
- American 0591
- Asian 0305
- Canadian (English) 0352
- Canadian (French) 0355
- English 0593
- Germanic 0311
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- Middle Eastern 0315
- Romance 0313
- Slavic and East European 0314

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Philosophy 0422
Religion
- General 0318
- Biblical Studies 0321
- Clergy 0319
- History of 0320
- Philosophy of 0322

Theology 0469

### SOCIAL SCIENCES

American Studies 0323
Anthropology
- Archaeology 0324
- Cultural 0326
- Physical 0327

Business Administration
- General 0310
- Accounting 0272
- Banking 0770
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- General 0501
- Agricultural 0503
- Commerce-Business 0505
- Finance 0508
- History 0509
- Labor 0510
- Theory 0511

Folklore 0358
Geography 0366
Gerontology 0351
History
- General 0578
- Ancient 0579
- Medieval 0581
- Modern 0582
- Black 0328
- African 0331
- Asia, Australia and Oceania 0332
- Canadian 0334
- European 0335
- Latin American 0336
- Middle Eastern 0333
- United States 0337

History of Science 0585
Law 0398
Political Science
- General 0615
- International Law and Relations 0616
- Public Administration 0617

Recreation 0814
Social Work 0452
Sociology
- General 0626
- Criminology and Penology 0627
- Demography 0938
- Ethnic and Racial Studies 0631
- Individual and Family Studies 0628
- Industrial and Labor Relations 0629
- Public and Social Welfare 0630
- Social Structure and Development 0700
- Theory and Methods 0344

Transportation 0709
Urban and Regional Planning 0999
Women's Studies 0453

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- General 0473
- Agronomy 0285
- Animal Culture and Nutrition 0475
- Animal Pathology 0476
- Food Science and Technology 0359
- Forestry and Wildlife 0478
- Plant Culture 0479
- Plant Pathology 0480
- Plant Physiology 0817
- Range Management 0777
- Wood Technology 0746

Biology
- General 0306
- Anatomy 0287
- Biostatistics 0308
- Botany 0309
- Cell 0379
- Ecology 0329
- Entomology 0353
- Genetics 0369
- Limnology 0793
- Microbiology 0410
- Molecular 0307
- Neuroscience 0317
- Oceanography 0416
- Physiology 0433
- Radiation 0821
- Veterinary Science 0778
- Zoology 0472

Biophysics
- General 0786
- Medical 0760

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Geology 0372
Geophysics 0373
Hydrology 0388
Mineralogy 0411
Paleobotany 0345
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Paleontology 0418
Paleozoology 0985
Palynology 0427
Physical Geography 0368
Physical Oceanography 0415

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- General 0566
- Audiology 0300
- Chemotherapy 0992
- Dentistry 0567
- Education 0350
- Hospital Management 0769
- Human Development 0758
- Immunology 0982
- Medicine and Surgery 0564
- Mental Health 0347
- Nursing 0569
- Nutrition 0570
- Obstetrics and Gynecology 0380
- Occupational Health and Therapy 0354
- Ophthalmology 0381
- Pathology 0571
- Pharmacology 0419
- Pharmacy 0572
- Physical Therapy 0382
- Public Health 0573
- Radiology 0574
- Recreation 0575
- Speech Pathology 0460
- Toxicology 0383

Home Economics 0386

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- General 0485
- Agricultural 0749
- Analytical 0486
- Biochemistry 0487
- Inorganic 0488
- Nuclear 0738
- Organic 0490
- Pharmaceutical 0491
- Physical 0494
- Polymer 0495
- Radiation 0754

Mathematics 0405
Physics
- General 0605
- Acoustics 0986
- Astronomy and Astrophysics 0606
- Atmospheric Science 0608
- Atomic 0748
- Electronics and Electricity 0607
- Elementary Particles and High Energy 0798
- Fluid and Plasma 0759
- Molecular 0609
- Nuclear 0610
- Optics 0752
- Radiation 0756
- Solid State 0611

Statistics 0463

#### Applied Sciences

Applied Mechanics 0346
Computer Science 0984
Engineering
- General 0537
- Aerospace 0538
- Agricultural 0539
- Automotive 0540
- Biomedical 0541
- Chemical 0542
- Civil 0543
- Electronics and Electrical 0544
- Heat and Thermodynamics 0348
- Hydraulic 0545
- Industrial 0546
- Marine 0547
- Materials Science 0794
- Mechanical 0548
- Metallurgy 0743
- Mining 0551
- Nuclear 0552
- Packaging 0549
- Petroleum 0765
- Sanitary and Municipal 0554
- System Science 0790

Geotechnology 0428
Operations Research 0796
Plastics Technology 0795
Textile Technology 0994

### PSYCHOLOGY

General 0621
Behavioral 0384
Clinical 0622
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Experimental 0623
Industrial 0624
Personality 0625
Physiological 0989
Psychobiology 0349
Psychometrics 0632
Social 0451

APPROVED BY:

Dr. Mary Lou Dietz (Chair)

Dr. Janice Drakich

Dr. Larry L. Kulisek (History)

**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this research was to investigate the impact of the prison environment on Lifers' identity. It was hypothesized that individuals exposed to a prison environment, especially for long periods of time, are likely to experience conversion, or tranformation to a "convict" or "inmate" identity.

Using a symbolic interactionist theoretical approach, and John Lofland's model of identity transformation as a guideline, processes of social interaction, which may produce transformation of identity were examined within the prison environment. The research was conducted in federal penitentiaries in Kingston, Ontario. The methodology consisted of face-to-face interviews with 40 Lifers.

Data analysis focuses on the processes of identity transformation: Patterns of interaction, social processes relating to adjustment to prison, bonding with the prison environment and other prisoners, the nature of contact with family (extra-institutional bonds), family impact on the conversion process, and intensive interaction.

Literature related to the impact of prison on individuals, acknowledges that criminal or convict self-identification results from lengthy incarceration. Absent in the literature is an explanation as to how a criminal or convict identity emerges. As such, a more detailed account of how identity transformation is achieved in prisons, is undertaken in this study.

Lifers experience tension at the beginning of their sentence. Efforts to neutralize tension involve learning the prison subcultural norms during initial periods of incarceration. As such, transfer into prison represents a turning point to Lifers. Lifers bond with the prison world, to the extent that they adopt a subcultural "code of behaviour." Friendships develop after a slow, strategic, and cautious process. Often, Lifers maintain contact with family members through visits, letters, and phonecalls. Administrative restrictions on visits, geographical separation, and selective dissemination of information by Lifers to their families, makes it impossible for family members to influence the conversion.

Lifers also interact with other prisoners through direct and/or non-verbal communication. Information is relayed about prescriptions for behaviour and eventually, they adopt a set of attitudes which help them survive in the prison environment.

A "process" of induction into the prison environment and manifestation of a "convict" identity has not been demonstrated. This is true, even though support for the Lofland model has been generated and findings support the presence of "convict" identity. Lifers reject identification as a "convict" or "inmate" and "Lifer" identity prevails.

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Finally, to the Lifers in Ontario Region federal prisons, my appreciation is extended for their participation and interest in this research.

This thesis is dedicated to my brother Steven
and my friend Ford Keillor

Their encouraging words gave me incentive
to pursue my academic ambitions

I'm a Lifer here. On the street I'm not going to say I'm a Lifer. That's something that has been put on me the day I was sentenced. I felt like a Lifer since the day I was sentenced.

(Lifer in a medium security Canadian prison)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

In 1835, the first major federal penitentiary was opened in Kingston, Ontario. Kingston Penitentiary, according to Carrigan (1991,327) was designed to "reflect the most up-to-date thinking in penology and to accommodate the new philosophy of reform." Before Kingston Penitentiary was built, even though other prisons did exist in Canada, popular punishments for law-breakers included public humiliation, banishment, and transportation (to other countries for specified periods of time). The insignificance or ineffectiveness of such punishments was the major impetus for the establishment of a new federal penitentiary in Canada (Ekstedt and Griffiths 1988,20).

Pentitentiaries and reformatories in Canada maintained a punitive philosophy, emphasizing strict rules and dictatorial management until 1938. At that time, the Archambault Commission recommended complete reform of prison administration. The recommendations provided for the "reformation and rehabilitation of the offender" (Ekstedt and Griffiths 1988,51). Since then, the Fauteux and Ouimet Commissions have also endorsed a "medical" model or rehabilitative philosophy in prison (Ekstedt and Griffiths 1988, 52-53).

The shift in correctional policy resulted in the implementation of vocational, academic, and therapeutic programs in prisons. In addition to access to secondary school and university courses, prisoners now have access to vocational

training and employment in prison. Also, alcoholics and narcotics anonymous groups, anger management, and cognitive skills training are available in most prisons. The objective,

> to assist the offender in the development of daily livings skills, confidence to cope with...personal problems and social environment and the capacity to adopt more acceptable conduct norms. (Ekstedt and Griffiths 1988,56)

Within the prison environment, however, along with correctional service efforts to change offender social, educational, and employment status on release, is a subculture which can also produce changes in identity. That is, individuals exposed to the prison structure and others in that environment, especially for long periods of time, are likely to experience conversion, or tranformation to a "convict" or "inmate" identity. The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of the prison environment on Lifers' identity.

Using a symbolic interactionist theoretical approach, and John Lofland's model of identity transformation as a guideline, processes of social interaction which may produce transformation of identity were examined, within the prison environment. The research was conducted in federal penitentiaries in Kingston, Ontario. Face-to-face interviews with Lifers were conducted.

Data analysis employs the Lofland model, which charts the process of identity transformation, to focus on the stages of conversion. Specifically, parties to a conversion must 1) experience prolonged, acute tension; 2) pursue methods of coping with the tension; 3) seek acceptance within a new organization;

4) encounter that organization at a turning point in life; 5) develop affective bonds with the members of that organization; 6) neutralize attachments to family and friends not associated with or seeking membership in that organization; and 7) interact intensively with other converts in order to become a true believer. Patterns of interaction, and social processes relating to adjustment to prison, bonding with the prison environment and other prisoners, the nature of contact with extra-institutional bonds, and intensive interaction, are examined.

Literature related to the impact of prison on individuals acknowledges that criminal or convict self-identification results from lengthy incarceration. Absent in the literature is an explanation as to how criminal or convict identity emerges. This research attempts a more detailed account of how identity transformation is achieved in prisons.

## CHAPTER 2

### Theory

Symbolic interaction theory focusses on the interactive, dynamic processes which occur in groups and between individuals. Symbolic interaction theory, therefore, formed an appropriate framework for this research. This framework includes,

1. Symbolic interaction theory concentrating on social interaction which influences identity.

2. Prisonization or institutionalization concepts such as:

   (a) Total institutions which are structural forums wherein certain interaction can occur.

   (b) Sykes and Messinger's (1960) "pains of imprisonment," and,

   (c) Donald Clemmer's (1958) theory of "prisonization" encompassing importation and deprivation models, which identifies typical "processes" that can occur in prison environments through interaction.

3. A social process theory wherein identity transformation might occur.

### Symbolic Interaction

In Berger and Luckmann we are informed that the "reality of everyday life is shared with others" (1966,27). In face-to-face situations, individuals confront each other and continuous interchange of expression occurs (Berger and Luckmann 1966,27-29). Symbolic interaction focuses on the nature of interaction and dynamic social activities which take place between people (Charon 1992,23). Societies are composed of interacting individuals and change occurs within societies and individuals because of this interaction (Charon 1989,23).

Hewitt (1984,205) argued that everywhere in life people

engage in,

> bargaining, negotiation, deliberation, agreements, temporary arrangements...and a variety of other procedures in which the accomplishment of social order and coordinated activity is a deliberate undertaking.

Symbolic interactionists focus on unfolding processes of interaction and the meaning of certain experiences fcr participants in interaction. Interactionists acknowledge that individuals can attach multiple meanings to the world and such meanings are shaped through interaction with others (McHugh 1968; Prus 1984).

It is within social interaction and in the presence of referent others that identity is defined. Once crystallized, identity is maintained, modified, and reshaped by social relations (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Charon 1992; Hewitt 1984). Prus (1984) contends that concepts applicable to any group situation, such as identity, conflict, and co-operation are emergent, negotiable aspects of group life.

Charon argued that when we attribute an identity to someone, and act accordingly, that person, to whom the identity is attributed, is influenced (1992,151). Merton's self-fulfilling prophecy, discussed in Charon (1992,151), dictates that,

> individuals act as though something were true of the other, and even though it may not be, the other, in turn, thinks of self in these terms and acts that way.

While individuals act in accordance with certain definitions, others in the interaction come to believe in the label and also act accordingly. Casting people into different roles influences people's actions and eventually, they begin to

think of themselves in that manner and behave the way we want (Charon 1992,151). This process is known as "altercasting" (Hewitt 1984,171) where, according to Hewitt, one person's acts constrain and limit what another can do and be.

In altercasting, individuals are forced to defend, or at least appear to defend, a position they do not wish to defend (Hewitt 1984,171). The author continues,

> there lies an acceptance of an issue--an implicit agreement that what is charged is worth talking about and thus might actually be true. (Hewitt 1984,171)

Further,

> If I can convince others who you are, I influence their definition of you and thus their action toward you, and ultimately your interaction with them...you are someone that people label, and the labels that arise in interaction... become important for interaction. (Charon 1992,152)

In face-to-face interaction altercasting might produce attitudes and actions which contradict a preconceived label or identity. That is, individuals may declare an identity different than the one presented (Charon, 1992,151). Pre-constructed labels might be abandoned by the altercaster if they are, through subsequent interaction, found to be inapplicable (Berger and Luckmann 1966,29). Eventually, individuals in interaction will negotiate an identity (Charon 1992,152). Berger and Luckmann claim that this negotiation is likely arranged in a manner similar to a typical bargaining process which occurs between a buyer and seller.

**Interaction & Identity in Total Institutions**

Emergent group processes which are responsible for

negotiated, altered identities are inevitable where intense interaction occurs. Confinement in total institutions provides an ideal setting for intense interaction. According to Goffman (1961), total institutions are places where certain aspects of life such as sleep, recreation, and work occur in the same place under one authority. Daily activity is rigidly scheduled and pursued in close proximity to others. Everyone is treated alike and required to perform similar duties and activities. These circumstances produce alterations of the self. Penitentiaries and jails, designed to protect the community against intentional dangers are such total institutions. Moreover, interaction and administrative policies in total institutions, such as stripping inmates of their personal belongings and monitoring their activity can, according to Goffman (1961), hasten identity alteration of prisoners.

Identity change or conversion can begin during initial moments of institutional socialization which involves admission procedures known as "trimming" or "programming" (Goffman 1961,16). These procedures include searching, photographing, fingerprinting, assigning numbers and living quarters, instructions on rules, and the curtailment of self-perception by stripping away possessions in which individuals have invested certain feelings (Goffman 1961,16-18). Thus, prisoners are shaped and coded into an object which can fit into the administrative machinery and the homogenous prison identity of convict.

**Conceptualizing the Impact of Imprisonment**

Penitentiaries as total institutions result in what Sykes has classified "pains of imprisonment" (Sykes 1958,64) which Lifers, given the length of their confinement, are bound to experience. Loss of liberty, deprivation of goods, services, and social relationships produce threats to inmate psychological well-being and sense of personal worth (Sykes 1958,64). Frustrations and deprivations in the form of thwarted goals, discomfort, boredom, and loneliness carry a profound threat to the foundations of the prisoner's being, and as a result, self-esteem is bound to deteriorate or waver (Sykes 1958,79).

To mitigate the rigors of confinement, prisoners establish a pattern of social interaction (Sykes 1958,82) within a subculture which provides alternative codes or value systems as a means of alleviating threats to self-esteem (Sykes and Messinger 1960,5). Group cohesion or inmate solidarity is the basic theme of this subculture which includes,

> playing it cool and doing your own time...not taking advantage of inmates by way of fraud or dishonesty...showing courage and maintaining integrity when faced with aggressive behaviour by staff or other inmates...treating guards with suspicion and distrust. (Sykes and Messinger 1960,5-9)

Lifers learn this code of conduct through interaction with other prisoners, resulting frequently in the internalization of a "convict" identity. The dynamics of assimilation into prison subculture and convict identity have been labelled prisonization and represent a form of conversion (Clemmer 1958).

Prisonization,[1] is seen to be a consequence of the depersonalizing, stigmatizing effects of legal processing and institutional admission, combined with alienative effects of coercive power, imposed on inmates by correctional officials (Zamble and Porporino 1988,7).

Prisonization affects inmates by intensifying conformity to the ideology of the prison community. Susceptibility to the culture depends on pre-custodial relationships, the extent to which the prisoner accepts codes or rigidly held doctrines, and length of sentence (Clemmer 1958; Zamble and Porporino 1988). Lifers are particularly susceptible to prisonization and consequently to unsuccessful community post-release reintegration (Sykes and Messinger 1960).

John Irwin (1987) does not dispute the existence of a convict social world in prisons as discussed in Sykes, Sykes and Messinger, and Clemmer. In the thirty years following this research, however, revised and updated descriptions of convict social organization have been discovered in prison research (Irwin 1987,61). Irwin (1987) presents his own and others

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[1] Prisonization variables have been divided into two competing models, deprivation and importation. The deprivation model examines the relationship among prisonization and length of sentence, interpersonal involvements, social role adopted by the inmate, type of institution, and powerlessness of the inmate (Zamble and Porporino 1988). Legal processing and induction into the prison are part of the deprivation model (Thomas 1977). The importation model highlights the effects of pre-prison socialization, length of involvement in a criminal career, and behavioural patterns brought into the institution (Zamble and Porporino 1988).

findings in contemporary prison research which emphasize important social phenomenon in the prison life of most convicts.

First, administrative policies have undermined convict cohesion. For example, troublesome or powerful convicts are transferred or segregated from the rest of the population for long periods of time. Second, because of large populations and numerous transfers, few convicts are well known by a large number of other convicts, nor do they assume particular "roles" in regard to the prison as a whole. Finally, treatment programs, which have been introduced in prisons, have resulted in greater communication between convicts and the administration (Irwin 1987,65). As a result full immersion into the prison subculture which Sykes, Sykes and Messinger, and Clemmer describe, and eventually, a convict identity, is circumvented.

Irwin argues that identities that exist before individuals enter prison, are not destroyed by the prison experience. Also, there are individuals who bring with them to the prison world, a convict or criminal identity which effectively prepares them for prison life (63-64). Further, over and above a particular identity one might acquire and maintain in prison,[2] to some degree, convicts acquire the perspective of the convict. Convicts, particularly "square johns," acquire this taken-for-granted perspective, despite conscious efforts to avoid it. It is a perspective acquired by merely being in prison and engaging in

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[2]Irwin refers to various identities which emerge in the prison environment such as "dope fiends," "stool pigeons," "politicians," "square johns," etc.

prison routine for months or years (Irwin 1987,82-83).

**Identity Transformation**

According to Goffman, Sykes and Messinger, Clemmer, and Irwin prisoners undergo some form of change as a result of their confinement, social interaction, conversion to a convict identity, and internalization of a criminal ideology.

John Lofland (1977) expanded the concept of conversion to include the processes of conversion. Lofland's model, consisting of two conditions and seven steps can be applied to Lifers' conversion as follows:

(1) PREDISPOSING CONDITIONS represent attributes of persons prior to their contact with the cult, namely,

(a) Tension: a sense of strain, frustration, or deprivation existed among potential converts. This tension was characterized by a perceived discrepancy between an imaginary, ideal state of affairs and actual circumstances (Lofland 1977,34).

The subjects, in Lofland's study of the religious cult Divine Precepts, experienced some discontent with their present lifestyle or religion which prompted their association with the cult. It is difficult to expect that Lifers would consider membership in a prison subculture as an ideal alternative to unpleasant circumstances of their lives.[3] However, the point of admission into the prison represents a tense situation because of

[3]Some gang members, bikers, and members of other deviant groups regard prison time as status enhancing. Carl S. Taylor (1989) found minimal expression of fear among members of a Detroit city gang at the prospect of doing time. One member was envious of a friend who was "living the life" at Jackson.

uncertainty and may therefore predispose Lifers to conversion.

(b) Problem-solving perspectives: converts came to the Divine Precepts because of unavailability of alternative, acceptable ways of defining and coping with problems (Lofland 1977,41-42). People who come to the prison subculture have few alternative ways of coping with problems associated with their confinement. Protective custody, becoming a loner, or getting involved with the group represent very limited mechanisms for coping with long-term confinement.

(c) Seekership: pre-converts in the Lofland model who failed in their attempts to solve problems by alternative means sought resolution in a new religious perspective. Conventional religious organizations failed to provide adequate solutions which resulted in seekership among unusual religious organizations (Lofland 1977,44-46). As a result of limited choices available to Lifers for coping with problems, most seek or are accorded a certain status among other convicts. A convict society is what they must live within and they can emerge with a "convict," or "leader," identity.

(2) SITUATIONAL CONTINGENCIES refer to conditions which develop through direct confrontation and interaction between potential converts and existing members and lead to successful recruitment of persons already predisposed toward the enterprise (Lofland 1977:34). These situational contingencies include,

(a) a turning point: all pre-converts in Lofland's study reached a turning point in their lives. Each had come to a point

when old lines of action were complete, had failed or were disrupted. They were faced with the opportunity or necessity of doing something different with their lives (50).

Turning points are referred to in Denzin (1989) as epiphanies (15). Denzin argued, epiphanies are,

> Those interactional moments that leave marks on people's lives...have the potential for creating transformational experiences for the person. (Denzin 1989,15).

Epiphanies can be major, cumulative, illuminative, or minor and relived.[4] The major epiphany involves an experience that shatters a person's life and the person's life is never the same again (Denzin 1989,17). The major epiphany relates to the situation of Lifers. To illustrate a major epiphany, Denzin uses a situation where a homicide was committed which led to the arrest, trial, and imprisonment of the perpetrator.

Admission into the penitentiary represents a **major** turning point which can shatter a person's life and begin the conversion process among Lifers. Old lines of action will be disrupted and Lifers will be faced with the necessity of doing something different with their lives. Additionally, Lifers are bound to experience crisis or problem situations, which will affect deep levels of their lives.

(b) cult-affective bonds: an affective bond must develop or exist between pre-converts and one or more of the converts.

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[4]Cumulative epiphanies result from a series of events which build up in a person's life. The minor or illuminative epiphany results from underlying tensions and problems in a situation or relationship. In the relived epiphany, individuals relive a turning point moment.

Affective ties were developed between pre-converts and Divine Precept members and final conversion occurred when the opinions of converts were accepted by pre-converts (Lofland 1977,51-52).

Conversion among Lifers would involve development of an affective bond, given their similar circumstances and continuous exposure to each other. Once the new prisoner accepts and is accepted by the prison population, we might expect a new identity to emerge. Development of friendships and group solidarity would indicate that some form of bonding has taken place among Lifers.

(c) extra-cult-affective bonds: Lofland anticipated that non-Divine Precept associates of the convert-in-process would express some dissent with the conversion. Extra-cult controls and how they restrain or fail to restrain the conversion should be investigated (Lofland 1977,54).

Lifers' extra-prison acquaintances would have difficulty in circumventing full conversion. These associates might not understand the dynamics of prison interaction. Infrequent visits and letters would not be sufficient to restrain full conversion. Abrupt and continuous cessation with outside relationships and association with other inmates is bound to affect identity.

(d) intensive interaction: conversion resulted from intensive interaction with other converts. This interaction involved daily or hourly physical accessibility to other converts. Without prolonged association with converts, total transformation failed to develop among pre-converts (Lofland 1977,57-58). Lifers are involved with other inmates on a daily

and hourly basis providing an opportunity for intensive interaction to occur.

According to symbolic interaction theory then, identity is defined through interaction with others. Lifers are engaged in daily, face-to-face interaction with other Lifers and short-term prisoners. An interchange of expression can occur. Lifers can observe the actions of others and assign meaning to what they observe. They can act in accordance with those meanings and eventually negotiate a new identity.

Lofland's model of identity transformation can be applied to an examination of altered identity among Lifers. Tension at the point of admission into prison may predispose Lifers to conversion. Further, admission into prison represents a turning point, when old lines of action are disrupted and Lifers are faced with the necessity of doing something different with their lives. Lifers are segregated from extra-institutional bonds. Infrequent visits and correspondence from extra-institutional associates, and their lack of understanding of the dynamics of the prison world, would be insufficient to restrain full conversion. Friendships and acceptance into the prison population would indicate that bonding has occurred. Finally, Lifers have the opportunity for prolonged, intensive interaction with other convicts.

The opportunity for negotiated, altered identity is, therefore, possible in prison. Since the predisposing and situational contingencies which comprise the Lofland model of

identity conversion can be applied to the circumstances of Lifers, they are potential converts.

## CHAPTER 3

### Literature Review

This chapter presents research which has examined the effects of long-term incarceration on alterations of the self, and the process of identity transformation in other situations.

### Long-term incarceration

Research into the effects of long-term incarceration has acknowledged debilitating psychological and sociological effects of lengthy custodial sentences and their implications for post-release success. The research has identified a relationship between lengthy prison sentences and internalization of a convict identity.

Flanagan (1981), Thomas (1977), and Thomas, Peterson, and Cage (1981) cite evidence to support the notion that prisoners adopt certain behavioural and attitudinal characteristics in an effort to avoid conflict and endure the deprivations associated with their confinement. Their findings show that experiences to which prisoners are exposed reinforce self-conceptions and their willingness to define themselves as criminal. Thomas et al., argue that,

> Both theory and simple intuition...strongly imply that integration into what amounts to an inmate contraculture encourage the adoption of a variety of attitudes, values and self-conceptions which...lessen the likelihood that inmates will move into conventional roles upon their release from prison. (1981,37)

Thomas et al. (1981,37) test five propositions about prisonization. The proposition most relevant to this study is that "a greater degree of prisonization will indicate a greater

degree of criminal self-identification" (Thomas et al. 1981,37). Questionnaire data were obtained from 876 inmates housed in maximum, medium, and cottage system institutions. The researchers found a moderate to strong relationship between prisonization and criminal self-identification in the maximum and medium security institutions.

Flanagan investigated the impact of long-term incarceration among 59 inmates serving an average sentence of 17.6 years in maximum security. He conducted unstructured, open-ended interviews in private meetings with long-term prisoners and found they had problems with time structuring, maintenance of extra-prison relationships, and assaults on self. Many long-term prisoners exhibited difficulty in making future plans. Notions of the future were dismissed because, as one interviewee claimed, "you can't measure twenty years" (Flanagan 1981,209). Lifers tended to concentrate on the "present" to reduce uncertainty and struggled to maintain self-esteem and self-image as autonomous adults.

Flanagan (1981) further noted that newly arrived inmates, facing lengthy sentences associated with other inmates who shared a similar plight. Information was shared between new inmates and those experienced with the prison environment, about prescriptions concerning proper behaviour. Articulation of attitudes and opinions by new inmates eventually led to the adoption of a set of attitudes which helped the prisoners survive. One of four prescriptions embraced by long-term inmates

in an effort to avoid conflict was the wise choice of associates.

In combination with a stated interest in constructive use of time, long-termers tended to restrict their time perspective to the "here and now" (Flanagan 1981,219). This "here and now" perspective forced inmates to focus on the demands of the prison environment and lose the ability to consider life on the outside. As a result, long-term prisoners became wedded to the artificial world of the institution. Flanagan noted,

> The need to walk a line between the two worlds is real, and many long-term inmates worry about their ability to do so for an extended period of time. (1981,219)

Flanagan alerts us to information sharing with new prisoners by those already experienced with the prison environment, and choice of associates. Such situations are the subject of interpersonal interaction.

Thomas (1977) studied the extent of criminal identification using: 1) importation model variables such as post-prison expectations, employment, felony arrests, monthly income, and education; and, 2) deprivation model variables, including contextual powerlessness and number of years served. Thomas (1977) found higher levels of criminal identification among prisoners whose evaluation of post-prison chances was negative. Additionally, perception of powerlessness generated a higher level of criminal self-identification than number of years served.

Criminal self-identification or bonding with the institutional world was deemed to impose threats on post-release

success. The circumstances found by Thomas (1977) which led to criminal self-identification occurred during incarceration but focused on post-release perspective of prisoners.

Flanagan (1981), Thomas (1977), and Thomas, Peterson, and Cage (1981) found that changes in individual perception of self occurred as a result of lengthy incarceration. Other research reports findings contradictory to that which claims long-term incarceration imposes debilitating psychological and sociological effects on prisoners.

MacKenzie and Goodstein (1985), and Zubrycki (1984) agree that adverse effects of long-term confinement have not been demonstrated satisfactorily in existing empirical research. MacKenzie and Goodstein, especially, argue that research, which claims that prisoners lose interest in the outside world, come to view prison as home, lose decision-making ability, and define themselves within the institutional context, lacks convincing evidence.

MacKenzie and Goodstein's (1985) primary complaint with existing research is that it considers long-term prisoners as a "unidimensional group whose reactions to confinement would form a consistent pattern" (399). MacKenzie and Goodstein present findings that many offenders enter prison with considerable knowledge of the prison environment, while others are less prepared for the experience and have more difficulty with the transition. Further, prisoners develop different modes of adaptation when adjusting to the prison environment (400).

On this basis, MacKenzie and Goodstein divided a sample of 1270 short- and long-term, maximum security prisoners into subgroups. Respondents were classified into two general groups: those who had no previous experience with the criminal justice system and those who had previous experience with the criminal justice system. Respondents who had served in excess of six years in prison were considered long-term offenders (LTOs) as well as those who received sentences of six years or more in prison. Those serving less than six years were classified as short-term offenders (402-404).

Long-term prisoners were also classified as early- and late-LTOs. Early LTOs had served an average of 1.3 years on average sentence lengths of 12.1 years. Late LTOs had served an average of 10.3 years and were serving sentences averaging 15.7 years. Finally, for the purposes of examining adjustment to the prison environment, LTOs were divided into three sub-groups. MacKenzie and Goodstein classified "traditional" Lifers as those who led a prosocial lifestyle (full-time employment or school) prior to prison and had no experience with the criminal justice system. "Habitual" offenders were those who had previously been arrested and convicted of an offence and who had not been involved in a prosocial lifestyle, prior to incarceration. Those who did not fall into either category, were classified as "others" (MacKenzie and Goodstein 1985,406).

Discussion of the findings compare the experience of adjusting to prison, amongst the various subgroups. The early

period of incarceration was more stressful for LTOs than later periods. Short-term prisoners, anticipating shorter prison terms, were better able to adjust to prison life. Prisoners with previous records of arrest and conviction were better prepared for prison life than LTOs with no previous experience with the criminal justice system. The researchers found no differences in patterns of adjustment to prison between "traditional" and "habitual" LTOs, even though "habitual" LTOs were more criminally experienced and involved to a lesser degree in pre-prison prosocial activities than "traditional" LTOs. Finally, there was no evidence of psychological deterioration over time. MacKenzie and Goodstein conclude that LTOs, while they experience transitional problems during the initial period of incarceration, adapt successfully to prison (405-410).

Porporino and Zamble (1984), Wormith (1984), and Zubrycki (1984) argued that no convincing evidence existed to suggest that severe emotional, psychological, and physical deterioration resulted from lengthy incarceration. In addition, and similar to what McKenzie and Goodstein argue, Porporino and Zamble argue, that an understanding of adaptation to the prison environment has not been advanced in literature on long-term incarceration. This is because of the tendency of researchers to ignore variation and attempt to account for uniformity of behaviour (403-405). Further, prison environments will undoubtedly affect individuals in a variety of ways. Individuals vary in the types of coping strategies they adopt. Porporino and Zamble encourage researchers

to account for individual perceptions and reactions to specific events when studying the prison environment (406-411).

Wormith (1984) reviewed psychological and sociological research which has inquired into the effects of long-term incarceration. In reviewing certain sociological literature, Wormith claimed,

> In reality, the evidence for a profound, incapacitating influence, that is both commonplace and severe, is scarce, if existent at all. (1984,426)

Wormith (1984,426) suggested that the prison experience is complex and interactive. It should not be embraced by terms such as "institutionalization" or "prisonization." Nor should it be explained by a single model such as importation and deprivation models.

Porporino and Zamble (1984), Wormith (1984), and Zubrycki (1984) suggest a need to expand our understanding of the adaptation to the prison environment. Porporino and Zamble (1984,404) especially, argue that,

> An understanding of what conditions of imprisonment affect people in what ways will be crucial for the realization of effective correctional policy and practice.

Finally, Porporino and Zamble (1984) acknowledge that considerable literature exists focusing on the prison experience. However, studies have been deficient in advancing an understanding of adjustment processes and change that occurs during incarceration.

The majority of the above research (Flanagan 1981; MacKenzie and Goodstein 1985; Porporino and Zamble 1984; Thomas 1977;

Thomas, Peterson and Cage 1981; Wormith 1984; Zamble and Porporino 1988; Zubrycki 1984), regardless of contradictory findings, supports the fact that individuals are affected by long-term incarceration. In addition to the existing research findings common sense suggests that persons in an isolated, single sex, quasi-military situation for 10, 15, or 25 years, would undoubtedly experience some personal change.

While frequent reference is made to the prison experience contributing to prisoners' criminal self-identification, no explanation is given as to how criminal or convict identity emerges. Further, researchers fail to treat "successful adaptation" to the prison environment as a form of identity transformation.

Further research, then, is required to address deficiencies in existing research on the effects of long-term incarceration. For instance, explanation is required to explain how criminal or convict self-identification emerges in prison, taking into account variation of individual perspectives and coping strategies.

The present research investigates the experience of Lifers incarcerated in Ontario federal penitentiaries, insofar as identity transformation is concerned. With the use of a social process theory of identity transformation, events and circumstances that prevail in the prison environment, which could impact on identity, are examined.

**Identity Transformation**

The following examines research focusing on the process of identity conversion in life situations other than the prison environment. Symbolic interaction theory recognizes that identity is crystallized through interaction, and once crystallized can be modified, altered, or changed. For instance, Charon (1992,85) notes,

> Identity is an important part of self-concept. It is who the individual thinks he or she is and who is announced to the world in word and action. It arises in interaction, it is reaffirmed in interaction, and it is changed in interaction.

Conversion also involves maintained as opposed to transitory change in identity. Transitory changes in identity are described as situational adjustments without true reorientation of perspective. War prisoners who reorient themselves during captivity as a means of adaptation, and return to their former identities upon release, illustrate transitory conversion. A status change such as marriage would produce a more permanent and maintained re-adjustment of self (Bankston, Forsyth, and Floyd 1981,283-284).

It was expected that Lifers would experience a maintained, not transitory conversion because of their lengthy confinement, and necessary subscription to the prison subcultural code. Research on prison inmate conversion is not available. Therefore, theory and research on conversion in other contexts is necessary to inform an examination of a Lifer's conversion process.

Chang (1989), and Greil and Rudy (1983) account for conversion of abused women to a "self-saver" identity and

alcoholics to the world view of Alcoholics Anonymous, respectively. Their findings suggest support for the Lofland model of conversion. Certain factors which they found to contribute to conversion--such as developing a bond or friendship and intensive interaction between pre-converts and converts which contribute to conversion--can be applied to the circumstances of Lifers.

Chang (1989), investigating female spouse abuse victims, used Lofland's model to explain identity transformation from an abused spouse to a "self-saver" (Chang 1989,537). Residents in a shelter for abused women, in the process of leaving abusive relationships, were seen to have experienced an identity transformation. They redefined themselves as having the power to prevent further victimization and acquired new "self-sufficiency orientations" (Chang 1989,536). Chang modified the Lofland model to apply to abuse situations and found that,

1. Shelter residents reported **acute** tension because of physical violence (Chang 1989,538-539).
2. Alternate **problem solving strategies** including religious and psychiatric avenues were sought and were unsuccessful (Chang 1989,541).
3. Inability to resolve violence and lack of adequate problem-solving strategies led to **seekership** in refuge shelters for abused women (Chang 1989,542-543).
4. Tiring of the abuse, recognizing the abusive spouse's need for help and their own low self-esteem represented **turning points**

to the shelter (Chang 1989,543-545).

5. **Affective bonds** between staff and residents were encouraged through mini victories and recreational outings (Chang 1989,545).

6. Encouragement from family and friends exerted positive effects on identity transformation. Willingness to alter feelings towards their mates enabled residents to progress toward a "self-saver" identity (Chang 1989,545-546).

7. **Intensive interaction** with staff and residents encouraged transformation to a "self-saver" identity. Continuous accessibility to staff was available to residents and on-going interaction was provided through counselling sessions (Chang 1989,547).

Greil and Rudy (1983) studied the process by which individuals came to identify with the ideology proposed by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). The conversion experience involved a major change in identity accompanied by a sincere belief. One central dynamic in the conversion process involved acceptance of the opinions of referent others.

Greil and Rudy (1983,7-10) described a conversion process of six phases which included, hitting bottom, first stepping, making a commitment, accepting the problem, telling one's story and doing twelfth step work. Some stages aligned with Lofland's model. The details of the stages which correspond to the Lofland model include,

1. Tension corresponded with hitting bottom (Greil and Rudy 1983,9).

2. Affective bonds outside AA facilitated conversion as long as acquaintances held positive views of the group (Greil and Rudy 1983,11).

3. Affiliation with the organization was contingent on unsuccessful attempts to solve the problem by alternate means (Greil and Rudy 1983,12).

4. Intensive interaction and forming close personal ties with the group were essential for conversion (Greil and Rudy 1989,16-17).

Greil and Rudy also identify certain dynamics which occurred within their multi-phase process of conversion which are relevant to this study. These dynamics include,

1. Encapsulation, wherein pre-converts are segregated or prevented from interacting with referent others. New AA members were expected to attend 90 meetings in 90 days which left them little time to interact with anyone other than AA members (Greil and Rudy 1983,16-17).

2. Through mortification, individuals accepted subordination to the group, confirmed a willingness to be judged by the standards of the group, and accepted the alcoholic identity (Greil and Rudy 1983,20).

These authors argued that individuals eventually accept the opinions of new friends and acquaintances through a variety of paths. In some cases, individuals seek a new perspective. In others, the new perspective appears by chance. Conversion can involve coercion or be voluntary. It can occur in closed settings

or where borders between the external environment and the conversion setting are not as well guarded (Greil and Rudy 1983,24).

Greil and Rudy inform this research of the role of encapsulation and mortification involved in conversion. Certainly, Lifers are encapsulated in a secure institutional setting and their mobility is monitored. Through coercive, rather than voluntary conversion, Lifers eventually come to accept opinions of new acquaintances and agree to be judged by the standards of the Lifer population.

Murphy, Waldorf, and Reinarman (1990) describe cocaine sellers' transformation of identity as they move into drug dealing. Eighty interviews with former cocaine sellers who became "big-time" drug dealers were conducted and the authors described modes of entry into a new identity. The authors argued,

> at the point where one has moved from being a person who has a good connection for cocaine to a person who is a good connection, a subtle shift in self-conception and identity occurs. (Murphy et al. 1990,323)

Murphy et al. (1990,322-324) used four basic steps in Becker's model of deviant careers to describe the process of becoming a "big-time" cocaine dealer. These steps included,

1. Avoiding the impact of conventional commitments that keep most people away from intentional non-conformity.
2. Deviant motives, learned in the process of deviant activity and interaction with others, must develop.
3. Public labelling, which involves being caught and having rules enforced. Few of the respondents experienced public

labelling but experienced gradual change in identity due to self-labelling.

4. Movement into an organized deviant group in which people with a common fate and similar problems form subcultures, enabled shifts in self-conception and identity.

Dealer identities tended not to replace former legitimate identities, but were added to a person's stock of conventional identities (Murphy et al. 1990,340). Eventually, the respondents accepted the identity of "dealer" as part of their selves. Customers began to treat them like salespersons and expected them to be available to take calls and do business. When dealers found themselves faced with certain demands, they came to be seen as dealers by others and to see themselves as dealers (Murphy et al. 1990,341).

Similar to the dealers in Murphy et al., Lifers are segregated from frequent communication with conventional acquaintances and move into a deviant or unconventional subculture for long periods of time. The Murphy et al. study suggests that how Lifers treat, or are treated by other prisoners, is an important element in the conversion process. These aspects of the conversion process can be incorporated into the Lofland model.

Based on the findings in the conversion literature discussed, Lifers can be established as potential converts. Briefly, they are segregated from conventional interpersonal relationships and they move into a subculture of individuals with

a similar fate and life circumstances. The research above suggests the following processes for, or similarities to the situation of Lifers,

1. Integration into a prison sub- or contraculture is inevitable and bound to produce self-identification as a criminal and affect movement into conventional roles on release. Relationships and interaction with other Lifers, which produce undesirable attitudes and behaviour, can become **normalized.**

2. Newly arrived Lifers will communicate with other Lifers and share information about the prison environment, eventually leading to the adoption of a set of attitudes to help them survive.

3. Lifers will exhibit difficulty in making plans for their future because of their lengthy sentences. They focus on the present, lose ability to consider life on the outside, and become wedded to the institution.

4. Pre-custodial (importation) and custodial (deprivation) circumstances might vary the level of internalization of a prison subculture and affect criminal self-identification.

5. Lifers might experience maintained as opposed to transitory identity transformation as a result of lengthy confinement and necessary subscription to the prison subcultural code.

6. Conversion can result from the situational influences of Lofland's model. To recapitulate:

(a) abrupt cessation of free lifestyle, admission into the institution, and other experiences which shatter a person's life represent turning points which begin conversion.

(b) bonding, or identification with other Lifers will occur.

(c) abrupt discontinuance and discontinuity with extra-prison relationships are inevitable.

(d) intense interaction, including negotiations and sharing information is unavoidable.

7. Lifers might exhibit sincere belief in their identity as a convict or criminal.

8. The organizational context of the total institution, can impact on identity conversion.

9. Lifers are **encapsulated** and segregated from frequent, meaningful interaction with non-prison relationships.

10. Conversion can take place once Lifers experience **mortification** and begin to accept definitions the group has for them.

11. Conversion is not voluntary, but the result of coercion and confinement in closed settings.

12. Deviant motives can develop in the process of deviant interaction to solve problems associated with prison.

13. Lifers move, or are moved, into an organized group of individuals with a common fate, serving a life sentence. Lengthy association with this group can influence a shift in identity.

14. Eventually, acceptance of a different identity can result from negotiation, altercasting, and having other Lifers treat them as convicts.

Several factors, then, which can impact on identity in prison, are identified in the literature pertaining to identity transformation. These factors, for the most part, are absent in the studies of long-term incarceration. Since the research conducted by Flanagan (1981), Thomas (1977) and Thomas, Peterson, and Cage (1981) few studies have been published on the experience of long-term prisoners, especially where identity is concerned.

Most of the literature acknowledges that living in prison for prolonged periods of time is bound to impact on individuals. Some contend that criminal self-identification emerges, adaptation to the prison environment occurs, and prisoners adopt certain attitudes, behaviours, and coping strategies. Critics (Porporino and Zamble 1984; Wormith 1984; and Zubrycki 1984) argue that researchers have failed to prove conclusively that individuals change as a result of lengthy incarceration.

This research introduces Lofland's social process theory of

identity conversion to the literature on long-term incarceration. Individual perspectives and diverse patterns of interaction are explored. As such, understanding of the impact of the prison environment on individuals is enhanced.

## CHAPTER 4

### Methodology

Kirby and McKenna (1989) describe research as a "voyage of discovery" (43). As the voyage progresses, researchers chart a process of exploration. During the research process, plans for gathering information are undertaken, the information is gathered and the researcher makes sense of, or analyzes the information (Kirby and McKenna 1989,44).The purpose of this chapter is to report the methods used in gathering information to explore the effects of long-term incarceration on individuals.

### The Research Instrument

In charting the research process, the first decision was to use a qualitative approach. Accordingly, direct, face-to-face interviews with Lifers were conducted. This oral, or qualitative, research method allowed Lifers to relate their subjective perceptions and interpretations insofar as their experience with long-term incarceration was concerned.

Two interview guidelines were constructed. The first guideline inquired into certain demographic variables such as family background, education, employment and leisure activities, and how these demographic features were affected or altered by the incarceration. The second guideline incorporated components of Lofland's model of identity conversion. These interview guidelines are attached as Schedules One and Two respectively.

### Accessing the Research Setting

Consent to access the research setting, the federal prisons

in the Kingston area and to interview Lifers was a necessary and unavoidable step of the research process. The research proposal was submitted to Dr. Frank Porporino, National Research Director and Mr. Ken Payne, Regional Research Director of the Correctional Service of Canada for approval.

In the process of seeking access to conduct these interviews, and as a courtesy, the wardens of Kingston Penitentiary, Bath, Millhaven, Joyceville, Collins Bay, Pittsburgh, Frontenac, and Warkworth institutions, and Prison for Women were consulted. The wardens received confirmation of approval from the regional research director and they assigned arrangement of the interviews to a case management officer in each institution. All of the above-named institutions with the exception of Pittsburgh were visited.

**The Sample**

The research sample consisted of 40 Lifers who were serving life sentences for either first- or second-degree murder in Kingston Penitentiary, Bath, Millhaven, Joyceville, Collins Bay, Frontenac, and Warkworth institutions, and Prison for Women. A preference to those who had served in excess of ten consecutive years on the life sentence, was expressed. However, since the sample was restricted by those who would cooperate, or those who were not engaged in work obligations and/or visits, not all participants met the 10-year criterion.

Those Lifers who participated in the research responded to invitations extended at weekly Lifer's group meetings. Volunteer

participants submitted their names to the Life Line in-reach worker or chairperson of the Lifer's group meeting. These names were then submitted to case management officers who scheduled the interviews. At the beginning of each interview, the nature and purpose of the research, as well as the interview process was explained to each participant and they were asked to read and sign an Agreement to Participate and Written Consent in the forms attached as Schedules Three and Four respectively. A total of 70 Lifers expressed a willingness to participate in the study. However 30 were lost due to work obligations, conjugal visits, or escorted temporary absences.

As stated previously, interviews were conducted with 40 Lifers. All of them are serving life sentences for first- or second-degree murder. First-degree murder convictions carried a Life sentence where 25 years of the sentence must be served before eligibility for parole. For second-degree murder, parole eligibility ranged from 7 to 15 years.

Of the 40 participants, four were women. These four women represented 11% of women serving life sentences at Prison for Women (Prison for Women Briefing Notes, 1991). The 40 Lifers served on average 10.4 years with a range of 2 years to 23 years. The distribution of time served, is as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 8 | Lifers | - 0-5 years |
| 10 | Lifers | - 6-10 years |
| 17 | Lifers | - 11-15 years |
| 3 | Lifers | - 16-20 years |
| 1 | Lifer | - 20+ years |

Twenty-one of the Lifers interviewed had never served time

in prison prior to the life sentence. Their experience with the criminal justice system and prison was limited or non-existent. Offences, by those with limited experience with the criminal justice system, included driving while intoxicated, possession of drugs or a weapon, and mischief. Many of them were fined or put on probation. Only one was held in custody for failure to pay fines. Otherwise, they had not been incarcerated in a provincial or federal institution.

Those with previous experience with the criminal justice system and prison had served an average of 4.86 years prior to the life sentence, ranging 18 months to 22 years. Only one Lifer had served 22 years in federal prisons, prior to the life sentence. Among the other Lifers, the most time served in federal prisons was five years. Some reported serving one or more provincial sentences ranging from six months to two years. The average number of years served on the life sentence for this group was 12.08, ranging from 3 to 23 years. Lifers who had not been incarcerated before the Life sentence, averaged nine years on the life sentence with a range of 2 to 16.5 years. The average age on admission for all Lifers interviewed was 29.23, ranging from 16 to 50 years of age.

**Data Collection**

Data were collected from the respondents during the interview which averaged 60 - 90 minutes, without the aid of electronic tape recording. Notes were taken during the interview in shorthand, and later transcribed onto a tape recorder by the

researcher. Given the circumstances under which the research was conducted, the potential for mistrust, which could affect the quality of the data, generated by a tape recording device was recognized. Still, this method of data collection allowed the researcher to record the interviews, almost verbatim. The researcher was careful to make frequent eye contact with the respondents to keep the interview as conversational as possible. Later, interviews were augmented with statements or incidents which were recalled during transcription.

To reiterate, participants were asked to sign an Agreement to Participate and a Written Consent before the interview began. The Agreement explained that Lifers would be engaged in a face-to-face, private interview with the researcher, and they would be asked to answer several questions, having the option at all times to refuse to answer any question, or end the interview at their option. In the Consent, the researcher guaranteed that, in written work, Lifers' identity would be disguised and no one, prison official or otherwise, would have access to the information provided. Lifers also had the option of withdrawing their consent to have certain information used in written materials.

**Data Analysis**

Before formal data analysis was begun, the researcher entered data gathered in the interviews from her own tape recorded transcription, into a word processing program. Each interview was transcribed into a separate file. Once the

transcriptions were complete, each file was imported into a qualitative data management computer program, known as "askSam." askSam allows retrieval of information based on a single, or combination of key words or symbols from a record or document. A key word, or symbol was used to retrieve information from the data, pertaining to each stage of the Lofland model.

For example, when the researcher examined the first stage of the Lofland model, "tension," it was anticipated that tension would be most acute at admission into the penitentiary. Admission was discussed with Lifers in terms of "what the prison experience was like for them when they **first** arrived." Hence, the word "first" was used as a key word or symbol for retrieving data pertaining to tension.

Data retrieved from the main data file in askSam could then be copied into a separate askSam file. Each askSam file, containing the data retrieved from a search, was re-transported to Word Perfect 5.1. Once the data were printed, the researcher could examine and analyze the testimony of Lifers with respect to each stage of the Lofland model. Patterns, or social processes relating adjustment to the prison world, bonding with other Lifers, contact with extra-institutional bonds and intensive interaction were examined. The chapters that follow discuss the findings from the qualitative analysis.

## CHAPTER 5

### The Research Setting

The City of Kingston, Ontario, situated approximately 300 kilometres east of Toronto, is rich with Canadian history and is also the site of ten federal penitentiaries. Beginning in 1835 with the construction of Kingston Penitentiary, the number of federal prisons has grown to include Millhaven, Bath, Collins Bay, Frontenac, Joyceville, Pittsburgh, and Warkworth institutions, Prison for Women and a minimum security prison for Women. With the exception of Warkworth all of these institutions lie within an approximate 20 mile radius of the core of the City of Kingston. Warkworth Institution is located in Campbellford, Ontario, approximately 100 kilometres northwest of Kingston.

Each of the maximum and medium security institutions are surrounded by a twenty to thirty foot stone or cement wall, or chain linked fence, topped off with scrolls of barbed wire as a measure of added security. For the Lifers living in minimum security, the wall which confines them to the institution is a simple white painted line, lying some twenty feet from the main entrance of the institution.

Millhaven Institution, combines medium and maximum security and is the first penitentiary with which the Lifer makes contact. Having been designated as "reception" the institution temporarily houses all short- and long-term offenders when they are first admitted to the federal pentitentiary system. In addition to those prisoners in "reception," the institution houses "general"

population prisoners and "static" population prisoners. The static population at Millhaven is a population of prisoners who will stay longer in Millhaven and will not be transferred to medium security in a timely fashion, becuase they require more restricted and longer security precautions. General population prisoners are held at Millhaven during which time they will be classifed as non- or low-risk prisoners. At that time, they are candidates for transfer to medium security. Non-risk prisoners would be those with incident free institutional records.

The average length of stay at Millhaven, reported by Lifers, was between three and seven years, during which time, no contact would be made with the outside world, except for medical emergencies and visits from relatives. Once approved, Lifers are transferred to medium security, at either Joyceville, Collins Bay or Warkworth institution. By the time they reach their 7th or 8th year of incarceration, depending on the status of their prison record, they begin a program of Escorted Temporary Absences or "resocialization passes" as one Lifer referred to them.

Among the Lifers who participated in the research, eventual transfer to a minimum security institution took place at or near the tenth year of the sentence. The promptness with which a Lifer cascades through the system depends primarily on a prison record without incident and participation in rehabilitative, educational, or vocational programs. Lifers, nearing their parole eligibility dates would then begin a program of Unescorted Temporary Absence, Day Parole, and then Full Parole. This is

known as a system of "cascading" or "gradual release."

Prison for Women combines maximum and medium security within one institution. Newly arrived prisoners spend the first few years of their sentence in a cell block, before they are moved into a living unit one floor below. The minimum security facility, a three storey limestone house, is located across the street from Prison for Women. Women are transferred there based on the same criteria as male Lifers with the added exception of availability of space.

Transfer from maximum, to medium, and eventually to minimum security also involves a gradual release in the regulation of the Lifer's mobility. One Lifer, presently resident in a maximum security institution, stated,

> ***My first two months at [maximum security prison] was spent locked up for 23 and a half hours a day. You were allowed a five minute call and a five minute shower every other day.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

From a medium security institution, another Lifer reported,

> ***I can participate in the Lifers group or any other group I want to in the evenings. My only obligation is to work. Other than that, my time is pretty well my own.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Finally, from a minimum security institution,

> ***There's more freedom...You're basically on your own. At Millhaven, you're restricted to whatever they want you to do. If they want you in your cell, you have to go. At Frontenac, Lifers are basically left alone to do their own thing.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

During the course of administering the interviews, the researcher had the opportunity of observing the internal

structure of the institutions. This provided some insight into the physical setting within which the respondents lived. In Millhaven and Kingston Penitentiary, these living arrangements comprised barred or dormitory styled cells. Similar accomodations existed at Collins Bay. At Joyceville and Warkworth, which approximated the appearance of a university campus, inmates lived in "living units" comparable to army barracks. These living units were separate from the main administrative section of the institutions. At Collins Bay the administration and living units were constructed in a "telephone pole" design. At Frontenac and Bath Institutions, which are minimum security institutions, living arrangements were similar to those observed at Warkworth and Joyceville.

Initially, the researcher doubted the potential quality of interviews scheduled at minimum security institutions. Perhaps, the perception was that the more regulated conditions under which medium and maximum security inmates lived would produce a more compelling account of the prison experience. In fact, each of the Lifers interviewed made a valuable contribution to this research. The researcher noticed afterwards, that those Lifers who had reached minimum security were probably the most experienced with each level of security. They re-affirmed many statements given by those just beginning their sentence or living in medium security institutions.

Although this chapter introduces the reader to the setting in which the research took place, the researcher was reminded by

Lifers that no one would ever understand the prison experience unless they lived it. Without rejecting the legitimacy of this statement, the researcher believes that the current study makes a valuable contribution to the body of criminological literature on long-term incarceration.

Of course, the researcher is conscious of the likelihood of being "conned by cons." Many Lifers were skeptical of the researcher's status as an "outsider" or someone who was "connected with the system." Often they inquired as to "who would see the results" and whether "their name would be used in the final report." Even though their anonymity was guaranteed, their participation in the study is on file with the institution. Hence, they were at liberty to manage the interview in a way, they thought, would not implicate them. As a result, accuracy of the data is open to debate. Still, 40 Lifers gave similar testimonies. Except for a few minor variations, their testimonies do not deviate substantially from what others said. By visiting various institutions, and in some cases, arriving unannounced, participants would not have had the opportunity of rehearsing responses.

Recognizing that barriers exist to unqualified accuracy of the findings, researchers should not preclude inquiry into the prison experience. Denzin (1989,81) claims there is never an "all-knowing" subject or person who knows everything relevant in a situation. To Denzin (1989,82) researchers, even though they seek to become knowledgeable about the situation or experiences

under study, are always interpreting such situations in terms of prior knowledge. As a result, full, objective, all-encompassing inquiry into a situation or experience of an individual is unlikely. The researcher has strived, to the best of her ability, to interpret the findings with accuracy, avoiding speculation. Efforts to manage analysis of the data include the researcher's interpretation of testimonies in terms of prior knowledge, and allowing Lifers' voices to be heard.

## CHAPTER 6

### Tension at the beginning of the Life Sentence

> *I thought at first I would go insane. The cultural shock was unbelievable...it was a difficult transition. It's still bad.* (Lifer, Canadian federal prisoner, August 1992)

In Lofland's study, pre-converts' sense of strain, frustration, or deprivation predisposed them to membership with the Divine Precepts. Discontent with their present lifestyle and a perceived discrepancy between an ideal and actual state of affairs, prompted association with the cult. In Chang (1989) and Greil and Rudy (1983), tension among pre-converts corresponded with an intolerable amount of personal difficulty. Problems with alcohol and living with an abusive spouse fuelled tension. Pre-converts experienced a need to improve present lifestyles. This tension was deemed a necessary prerequisite to conversion.

The researcher anticipated the presence of tension at the point when Lifers were admitted into prison. Also, tension among Lifers might not be the result of ongoing discrepancy between an ideal and actual state of affairs, similar to that found by Chang (1989), Greil and Rudy (1983), and Lofland (1977). Instead, tension could begin and build up during the trial. After conviction and sentencing, tension associated with transfer to prison would occur, and continue in an environment which was foreign and unpredictable.

Tension was investigated from the point of admission into prison. Lifers were asked to describe their experience with the prison environment on admission. In general, they reported that

the prison environment was unpredictable and volatile. Incidents of interpersonal violence could erupt spontaneously (see Porporino and Zamble 1984,404-405). The potential for sudden and unexpected altercations with other prisoners, and not knowing how to respond to them, represents a source of tension to Lifers.

One Lifer remembered what the beginning of her sentence was like, after 15 years. With no previous record of incarceration prior to the life sentence, she recalled,

> ***You're not aware of what's happening in here. You're in tight security with 120 other females. You don't know what they're in for--scary. I was so young and so uncertain about what's going to happen.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prisoner, August 1992)

As time passed, this Lifer learned that other women are mostly "violent to themselves" which helped to reduce the perceived threat to her own personal safety. She learned to avoid fights and arguments. Subscribing to the prison subcultural code accomplished this, and provided a measure of personal safety. She also avoids troublemakers and problem situations, such as soliciting contraband, which could have threatening outcomes.

In Chang (1989), Greil and Rudy (1983), and Lofland (1977), tension would subside as personal difficulty subsided and subjects' lifestyles "improved." In the case of this Lifer, as well as other Lifers, however, tension subsided after altering, or changing their way of living and interacting with others. This alteration only guaranteed their chances for survival in an uncertain, volatile environment.

Another Lifer, and first-time federal prisoner, now residing

in a minimum security institution confirmed that tension exists. He has served seven years on a Life-12 sentence. He recalled,

> ***There was a lot of tension. You don't know what's going to happen. One day, you could be out playing baseball and the next day you're in lockdown...At the snap of your fingers, something could happen. You could be just walking down the hall on your way to dinner and all of a sudden somebody in front of you will keel over. Sixty people saw it, but nobody saw it. You just keep on walking. You don't even let on like you know what happened, because if you do, you could be the next one to go.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prisoner, August 1992)

From the way he spoke, tension and incidents which generate tension, not only characterize the initial period of incarceration, but continue throughout the sentence. This Lifer confirmed that learning how to respond to certain situations, such as ignoring a stabbing, means tension would become less acute. Mitigating tension, however, means conforming to a set of rules which prevail in the prison world.

Another Lifer, having served two years on his life sentence, commented,

> ***I thought at first I would go insane. The cultural shock was unbelievable. There's absolutely nothing to compare it to. I kept waking up in the night and I thought I was in a dream. That this was not happening to me. It was total denial and it was an extremely difficult transition. It's still bad. It's a psychological death chamber.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He related his tension to the "cultural shock" he claimed to have experienced on admission. However, this "cultural shock" was not about entering a volatile, tense environment. Instead, it represented a discrepancy between his own personal mannerisms and habits and others with whom he was forced to live. For instance,

he reported having to "deal with things that I'm not used to dealing with," such as "rudeness" and "continual deceit." He reported feeling "out of place," amongst the prison population because,

> ***Most of these guys have never had jobs and a large per cent of them can't even write or read.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He also found it very difficult to "deal with the mentality" and felt so "out of place" because he has "worked very steady at a successful career." Despite his apparent dislike for other prisoners, he claimed to "interface with the population, partially out of necessity." This interaction is primarily due to his religious commitment to help other prisoners "see the clear light of day." Threats to personal safety were not severe. He claimed that the reason for this, was because many prisoners often consult him to discuss problems. He concluded,

> ***Well, as far as they're [prisoners] concerned, I'm still an enigma here. I'm not perceived as one of the guys.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He was prompted to explain who "the guys" are but failed to respond directly. He failed, during the course of the interview, to offer any clues to suggest that he subscribed to the prison subcultural code in order to alleviate tension and mitigate threats to personal safety. He was in an institution where more rigid restrictions are placed on mobility. Prisoners are routinely confined to their cells for up to 23 1/2 hours per day. He claimed to have more freedom than other prisoners to move throughout the institution because of his job and his spiritual

mission. However, his exposure to other prisoners, who would still be subject to lengthy lock-up, is reduced. Extraordinary restrictions on mobility would, therefore, reduce the potential for violence and the need to respond to threats to personal safety. It is, however, still early in his sentence. When he reaches medium security, his experience might change.

Tension was apparent in the testimony of another Lifer who had completed two years of incarceration in special handling. He summarized his experience with the transition,

> ***It was very scary. You don't know who to ask about what it's all about. You know that there's a protocol but you don't know what is right and what is wrong. You don't know who to ask. You don't know who to approach. Finally, you get the nerve to ask someone or you do whatever people are doing.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

"Not knowing who to ask" or "who to approach" about the "do's and dont's" in prison, is partly a function of an expectation in prison to avoid sex offenders and "stool pigeons." In Kingston Penitentiary particularly, the prisoner population requires "special handling" or "protective custody." Special handling and protective custody prisoners are often at risk in the general prison population. The risk is always associated with the nature of their offence (sex crimes against women and children, especially), their pre-custodial socio-economic or vocational status (primarily police officers) and those prisoners who have earned a reputation as "stool pigeons." Interaction with these prisoners could produce life-threatening consequences.

This Lifer did not admit to fitting the profile of a special

handling or protective custody prisoner. According to him, his confinement in special handling was an administrative strategy to rapidly move him through to medium security. Whether or not he was a special handling or protective custody prisoner, he was still forced to manage his behaviour inside, to guaranty his safety. When asked how he dealt with "not knowing who to ask" about the "do's and don'ts," he commented,

> ***A guy with his arms covered with tattoos, I would keep my distance*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Seaton (1987,20) confirms that tattoos on prisoners are meant to identify the wearer as someone to be feared. Tattoos are used as a means of gaining power. To this Lifer, heavily tattooed individuals are intimidating. Lifers who wear tattoos confirm that tattoos of flames, skulls, vicious animals, and motorcycle club logos for example, covering arms, chest, and back completely, are used as a strategy to protect themselves, by intimidating other prisoners. This Lifer continued,

> ***I try to stay pretty much to myself and observe. I'm a good listener and I pick up things by watching and seeing what others do. You basically follow the crowd. Eventually you start to get to know people and you hear things from them as well.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

It became apparent that limited interaction and "keeping to oneself" forms part of the prison protocol, not specifically addressed by Sykes and Messinger (1960). Frequently, Lifers reported spending a lot of time in their cells to avoid problems and protect themselves from threats to personal safety. Further, by listening, and "watching and seeing what others do," the rules

of the prison environment are conveyed. He confirmed that as his sentence progressed tension diminished.

Another Lifer, a first-time federal prisoner who identified himself as a "square john," also felt that keeping to himself was a key to personal safety and mitigating tension. He commented,

> ***If you're not part of the prison subculture, the only time you're confident is when you're locked in your cell.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

The "prison subculture" he referred to, involved inter-personal violence and incidents of soliciting contraband. He did not identify the rules of the prison world as part of the subculture. After 11 years of his life sentence, he also reports a sense of diminishing tension.

> ***Once you're there [prison] for a while, you realize that the problems and the violence are caused by certain events, like people hustling for drugs. They happen for a reason. There's usually reasons for the violence and the paranoia begins to diminish if you're not doing anything wrong.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

The expression, "not doing anything wrong" reflects conformity to the prison subculture, rather than compliance with administrative rules. Prisoners who "did their own time," "minded their own business," or respected another prisoner's "space and personal belongings," were not "doing anything wrong."

Other first-time prisoners were less traumatized with beginning their Life sentence. Experience prior to the life sentence, such as membership in a well-known biker organization, prior to the life sentence, could have helped first-timers make the transition without much anxiety. One Lifer, who had an easier

transition said,

> ***I knew what to expect when I came in. I knew how to do the time when I got here.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

This Lifer's readiness for prison would not surprise Wolf (1991) who found that within outlaw subcultures, such as biker organizations, members will adopt attitudes and learn behaviours that gravitate around independence, self-reliance, toughness, aggressiveness, and masculinity (343). These attitudes and behaviours also characterize the prison world. As a result, socialization into a subculture which approximated the prison world before this Lifer was incarcerated, minimized tension associated with the transition.

Another first-time federal prisoner credited his smooth transition to the life he led on the outside. He noted,

> ***I was lucky enough to work in a bar on the outside. The other guys that I hung around with look at the world as a man's world. I was quite an aggressive person on the outside...You see a little brutality and a lot of one-upmanship in bars. You meet the same people in here as you do on the street. Some are rotten and some are nice. Life doesn't change that much in here from out there. After an orphanage and a Roman Catholic school, it's more foreign to go outside from there than from here. I was from a neighbourhood where there were gangs. We'd fight with pipes and chains.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

However, his experience did not prepare him for the uncertainty of prison life.

> ***I wasn't sure really what to expect. I wasn't sure what went on in there [prison]. You're going into an environment that's like a cage. A lot of animals. The third day I was in there, one of the guys on the range got killed during a walk-out.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

His pre-custodial experience did help him face incidents in prison. For example, during a lock-down he was confronted in the laundry room by another prisoner who advised him "he could get killed for holding up someone in the laundry room during a lock-down." He continued,

> ***I just looked up at him. I told him I was going to stay until I was done. That I was just going to take my clothes out of the washer and put them in the dryer and when I'm done, I'm outa here. If I hadn't have done that, I would have been killed.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Standing up to an aggressor is interpreted by Lifers as a necessary means of survival forming part of the prison code. Often, Lifers reported that submitting to the demands of an adversary was an expression of weakness and left one vulnerable to physical assault. Hence, the need to remain steadfast during a confrontation.

In some respects, the Lifer referred to above fit the profile of a "state-raised" individual discussed in Irwin (1987) and Wright (1991). "State-raised" individuals are individuals who come to an adult prison after one or more commitments to institutions. Although he had no previous experience with incarceration, he was familiar with institutional life in orphanages and the "state-raised system."

Major themes of the "state-raised system" (Irwin 1987,26-29) include toughness, violence as a proper mode of settling disputes, and a willingness to resort to violence and face violence which characterized his life on the street as he described it. According to Wright (1991) "state-raised"

individuals are found to be the most violent and disruptive in prison. This Lifer claimed to maintain an image of toughness to promote personal safety in prison. He contradicted the profile of the "state-raised" individual by resorting to peaceful, negotiated methods of conflict resolution. He never admitted to resolving conflict through violence in prison. Nor did he acknowledge or give the impression that he was a violent, disruptive prisoner. However, because of his experience with institutional life and exposure to violence and violent individuals on the street, his transition to prison appeared less traumatizing for him than other first-time federal prisoners.

Other first-time prisoners reported different experiences with the transfer to prison. For instance, one respondent claimed his pre-custodial employment status, was responsible for his being singled out for protective custody and segregation during the first two years he was inside. During this time,

> ***I adopted attitudes that would terrify anyone...if someone tried to kill or stab me, I told them they better be goddam successful because if they didn't they'd have to deal with me.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

According to him, segregation and numerous transfers from one institution to another resulted in his "adopted attitudes that would terrify anyone." He claims the transfers contributed to these terrifying attitudes, because of the progression from "softcore" to "hardcore" correctional institutions.

When he was first admitted into the federal penitentiary system, he was transferred from one province to another where he

stayed for nine months. Within that province, he was transferred between institutions and the new one, according to him, was known as "Canada's toughest joint." He was there for four years. His experience with so-called "tough joints" did not end in this prison. After four years he was transferred again, to another prison where he claimed, "the real hardcore criminals" were incarcerated.

When he was transferred to another prison he found the atmosphere, "too smooth." He continued,

> ***I was used to an incident a day. I brought a lot of baggage with me. I was very aggressive. I didn't know how to shake it...I was one of the wheels in [prison]. I was a highly regarded inmate. I was tougher. If you want to get to me, you better kill me.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

The reason for his transfer to these "hardcore" institutions is unknown.[5] The origin of the "attitudes that would terrify anyone" however, is hardly left to speculation given his proclaimed need to defend himself against violent interactions or exposure to violence on a daily basis. The attitude, he claimed, was necessary to live in an environment where there was "a lot of tension" and "a high level of stress." "You get to a point, where you're thriving on a stressful attitude." It would seem, then, that his experience with extraordinarily volatile prisons had more to do with developing an aggressive attitude, than the protective custody. His method of mitigating tension was to

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[5]Prisoners may be transferred from one institution to another if their safety is at risk or they pose a risk of violence in the prison population.

develop a very hostile, aggressive demeanour.

Another Lifer reported being placed in protective custody on admission which lasted approximately four years into his sentence. During this time, he learned that a rumour was spreading throughout the institution that he was a martial artist. He denied the rumour, but claimed it served a purpose of protecting him. He began to recognize that even the staff feared him. After an escape attempt, he was transferred to another prison where he was held in segregation for six months. In the course of his sentence, he has accumulated 2.5 years in a special handling unit and three years in segregation which involved little or no communication with anyone inside or outside of the prison. As a result of his special handling, he claimed to have developed a "very bad attitude towards the staff," which he described as a "prisoner of war mentality."

Tension associated with uncertainty and volatility of the prison environment was less acute for these two Lifers. However, their circumstances would differ from others because of their segregation and special handling. First, they are exposed to fewer prisoners in segregation than the general population. They are also confined to their cells for longer periods of time, during the day. As a result, the probability of interpersonal violence is reduced. Secondly, in segregation, they are placed in circumstances which naturally generate resentment. For example, access to outside communication and mobility within the institution is restricted. Any mobility of protective custody

prisoners, within the institution, often requires handcuffing, shackling, and strip searches. After enduring extraordinary treatment associated with segregation, protecting or asserting themselves in altercations with prisoners in the general population is made easier.

Other Lifers spoke differently about the transfer. When speaking of their experience with the beginning of their sentence, Lifers who had an appeal pending focused their discussion on the hope they invested in a successful appeal, rather than the dynamics of the prison environment.

One Lifer, who appealed a Life-25 sentence and the conviction without success, remembered,

> ***Because you're all waiting for appeals, there is some hope for you to hang onto. When you come in, all you're hoping for is the appeal--that the appeal would be successful.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1993)

His discussion about the first few years of his incarceration revolved around the appeal which was unsuccessful, rather than fear or tension associated with uncertainty about the prison environment. He responded to the lost appeal by escaping custody. When he was returned to custody, he was confined to segregation for two years. According to this Lifer, his escape, four other institutional charges, and his long membership in a well-known motorcycle club before prison, has earned him a reputation among prisoners and administration as someone "associated with organized crime."

As a consequence of this reputation and the security it

provides, he is more confident about his safety in the prison environment. Notwithstanding his confidence, the rules which guaranteed personal safety are also important. The same rules which, for others, help to mitigate tension in prison. He commented,

> ***You can't look at anyone when something's happening or you'll be killed. You have to make sure you don't tell anyone what you've seen because they might think you'll rat on them...You have to stand up for your yourself, or someone will start beating up on you.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Another Lifer, now in medium security, was successful in winning a new trial on appeal. However, he was still found guilty of first-degree murder. He remarked,

> ***The first period, when you come in, you keep hoping and you keep pinching yourself, is this reality? You have the appeal to look forward to.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 192)

When he was found guilty a second time, he realized he was "stuck with the 25 years." Rather than staging an escape, he focused his attention on the next eight years of his sentence. This would bring him to his 15 year judicial review. Normally, prisoners are found to have problems with time structuring and making plans for the future (Flanagan 1981). This Lifer, on the other hand, became active on the Inmate Committee and various hobbies such as leather craft, building furniture, and computer programming with a view to winning favourable results on his judicial review. He also started an electrical repair shop in prison which he claimed earned him respect among prisoners because he fixed their televisions.

The tension, this man admitted to, had more to do with his present circumstances than fear of living in an unpredictable, volatile environment. This tension included living among stool pigeons and being double bunked. That is, having a cellmate. He is easily frustrated with administrative roadblocks in obtaining passes and being transferred from one institution to another for what seemed to him, trivial reasons. His reference to careful compliance to prison protocol to remedy tension was almost non-existent during the interview.

Finally, there are Lifers who had served time in prison prior to the life sentence. Those who had only served provincial time before the life sentence often talked about the fear they experienced at the prospect of serving federal time. One Lifer, who served 1.5 years provincial time, prior to the life sentence found the prospect of federal time,

> ***Scary, when I first came in. I didn't think I was going to come out of it alive.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He went on to say that when he first arrived at the federal prison and was getting settled in his cell, he overheard another prisoner say, "look at this one." He rushed to the bars and looked out, trying to see who made the comment, but was not successful. It was important to him to identify this individual in order to avoid a future confrontation. After that, he was "always thinking that someone was staking me out and was going to rough me up."

He seemed more concerned with being staked out and beaten up

by whoever made the comment, than he was with the possibility of sexual victimization. In fact, none of the Lifers interviewed in this study made reference to being sexually assaulted or engaging in sexual activity with other prisoners.

Evidence of the occurrence and impact of sexual victimization in prison environments is well documented in American literature (Bowker 1980; Fleisher 1989; Rideau and Sinclair 1982; Rideau and Wikberg 1992; Sloan 1971; Wooden and Parker 1982). Canadian researchers investigating violence in prison environments pay little or no attention to the issue (Cooley 1983; Porporino 1986; Porporino, Doherty and Sawatzky 1987; Porporino and Zamble 1984; Wormith 1984; Zamble and Porporino 1988; Zamble and Porporino 1990). Lack of attention to sexual victimization in prison could be due to under-reporting by prisoners or the possibility that such victimization is combined with discussion of violent aggression.

Bowker (1980) claims that rapes in prison have the effect of defining prison roles or identities. The "wolf" is the aggressor and the "punk" is the victim. Further, rape creates a climate of fear which exacerbates hostility and tension in the prison environment. Prisoners modify their behaviour to minimize the possibility of being raped. One way is to stay to themselves or, prisoners threatened by rape, are more likely to strike back at attackers, harming them severely (14-15). Such aggressive behaviour in prison, according to Porporino et al. (1987) becomes a way of life and means of survival that is difficult to shed

when prisoners return to society.

Another Lifer had served two provincial "bits" totalling 2.5 years. After 18 years in prison on a triple life sentence, he remembered,

> ***When I first came into the system, I was petrified. You have this vision of American prisons and it's the only thing you know. Pretty soon you find you have to fit in. It was a different society. I had to accept the fact I was doing Life. That meant I would never get out.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He also claimed to have been incarcerated in prison during a time when "everybody seemed to be uprising." He witnessed riots, sit-downs [peaceful protests], and uprisings. Under these circumstances, the tension in the prison environment was more acute. Further, an occasion where he witnessed a stabbing generated overwhelming fear. To this Lifer, "fitting in" and managing tension was accomplished by becoming involved in drugs and violence.

> ***Before I knew it, I was caught up with it. I was doing dope...The only way I found for me to adjust was to become crazy. I ran around with a weapon. Nobody could budge me.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

His method of mitigating tension was more dramatic than those who became active in extra-curricular activities or prison programs. Additionally, keeping to himself, to avoid conflict and regain some sense of personal safety, was not an option chosen by this Lifer.

From Prison for Women, another Lifer with two years provincial time, commented about her experience with admission into the institution.

> ***It was like a nightmare. I thought, this can't be happening to me. I'll never forget it.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Within 24 hours of her incarceration, she claimed her life was threatened four times. She was "scared to death" and reported locking herself in her cell for protection. She considered voluntarily checking herself into segregation for protection. She decided against this because of the implications that segregation would have for passes and parole.

As she continued, it became obvious that she had reconciled her tension. Once she learned she could walk away from a confrontation, without incident, she learned to relax in the company of other prisoners. In fact, she insisted,

> ***I'm pleasant. I talk to people. Others have learned not to invade my space. They know if I want company, I'll come out of my cell...If they [prisoners] visit, they understand they are not to bring the bullshit.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

"Bringing the bullshit" means discussing "trash about the institution" such as complaints with administration and interpersonal conflict with other prisoners. This testimony ranks in contrast with the "scared" woman who considered checking herself into segregation when she was first incarcerated. It seemed, then, that she had reconciled the tension she experienced by imposing certain demands and setting boundaries for interaction with other prisoners.

Lifers with experience in the federal system prior to the life sentence, seemed scarcely affected by the transition. One Lifer accumulated two years provincial and nine years federal

custody before starting his life sentence. He flaunted his experience with "doing time," by commenting,

> ***I don't classify these places as prison. They are part institution and part Holiday Inn. I knew the score and I had no trouble fitting in. As far as inmates go, you got inmates and you got cons. Inmates are first timers. They don't know the score. Cons know what the score is. Just because I know the score, that makes me a con. These places aren't prisons anymore. I knew the ropes right from day one on the life sentence because of my previous bits. I knew all the rules--all the do's and don'ts.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

No doubt, "knowing the ropes" when he was first incarcerated on the life sentence, would suppress the tension. He was not entering a totally unfamiliar environment. He "knew the score" and therefore knew what to expect. As the interview progressed, it became obvious that he was not intimidated by other prisoners.

> ***Any problems that I have, I talk to them [prisoners] like I'm their dad.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He makes it "perfectly clear" that he will not be "messed with" and has no problem "settling a score" if necessary. He would "take someone aside," explain the problem and suggest that "they shouldn't let it get any worse."

> ***I give them a talking to. I tell it like it is. You don't want any problems with me.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He was able to negotiate himself out of tense situations in this manner. "Peacefully, but sternly" he said, without violence. His mediation strategy supposedly extricated him from conflict with other prisoners and the tension conflict breeds.

Tension experienced by Lifers does not appear to compare to tension experienced by pre-converts in Chang (1986), Greil and

Rudy (1983) and Lofland (1977). Divine Precept pre-converts, new AA members, and "self-savers" experienced lengthy and prolonged tension, or dissatisfaction with their present lifestyle. This dissatisfaction eventually led them to membership in the cult or organization which supposedly "improved" their circumstances. For Lifers, tension might be lengthy and prolonged if it begins during the trial. However, tension does not appear to result from dissatisfaction with an existing lifestyle.

Tension was described in terms of fear, uncertainty, and unpredictability of the prison environment and is prevalent at the beginning of the life sentence. Lifers' experience with tension varies. The variations can be summarized as follows,

1. Lifers who had never been in a provincial or federal prison prior to the Life sentence, admitted to being scared when they were first incarcerated, more often than those who had served time;

2. Administrative procedures, such as placing a prisoner in segregation or special handling, altered the experience with tension on admission. Somehow, having to deal with circumstances of segregation and an extraordinarily hostile prison environment, caused some Lifers to become very aggressive;

3. The transition was less traumatic for those who had never served time, but were allied with a criminal or deviant lifestyle prior to the life sentence;

4. Lifers who entered the federal system with an appeal pending were less concerned about the dynamics of the prison environment and more focused on the outcome of their appeal;

5. Some Lifers, even though they had served time prior to the life sentence, still admitted to being scared when they were first admitted into prison on the life sentence. Often, these were individuals who had only served provincial time.

6. Lifers who had been incarcerated in the federal system prior to the life sentence were less traumatized by the transition, because they "knew the score."

Tension is apparent, then, in the form of uncertainty and fear in an unpredictable environment. The circumstances which generate this fear or tension did not cease to exist as the sentence progressed. The tension only subsides as Lifers learn to respond effectively to aggressive prisoners and threats to personal safety.

Admission into the prison and immediate subscription to the prison code predisposes Lifers to a turning point, especially those inexperienced with the prison world. Turning points were also recognized at later stages of their sentence. In the case of some Lifers, one or more points in the course of their sentence can be identified as turning points. Turning points, as part of the conversion process form the next area of investigation.

# CHAPTER 7

## Turning Points

> **A life sentence really turns your life around --royally.** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Lofland's subjects reached a point in their lives where old lines of action were complete, had failed, or were disrupted. Before entering the religious cult, they might have pursued alternative, acceptable ways of relieving the perceived discrepancy between their "actual" and "ideal" state of affairs. When alternative problem solving perspectives failed, they were faced with the necessity or opportunity of doing something different with their lives. A turning point was reached when they sought membership in the Divine Precepts.

Denzin's "epiphanies" are similar to Lofland's turning points. Epiphanies are, according to Denzin (1989), interactional events which create transformational experiences for individuals. In Chang (1989) the turning point or epiphany occurred when women, who were in abusive relationships, grew tired of the situation they were in, and sought refuge in a shelter. Further, Greil and Rudy (1983) found "hitting bottom" a prelude to a turning point among respondents who sought membership in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Uncontrollable problems with alcohol abuse led them to AA and eventual conversion to the "world view of Alcoholics Anonymous."

The experience of turning points for Lifers is the subject of this chapter. Various illustrations of points in the Lifer's

sentence, which can be interpreted as turning points are discussed. Any "problem solving perspectives" or examples of "seekership," which appear in the data, are also incorporated into the discussion. Both of these components of the conversion process, in combination with tension, are precedents to a turning point, which, according to Lofland, mobilized conversion.

Before engaging in the discussion, it is worth noting, that Lifers assign a meaning to the concept of the "prison subculture" different from that discussed in Sykes (1958) and Sykes and Messinger (1960). That "subcultural code" included, but was not limited to "minding your own business," "never looking in another prisoner's cell," and "never backing down to an aggressor." Lifers included "not admitting to witnessing a piping, beating or stabbing" as part of this code. According to Lifers, these "rules," are merely a formula for survival rather than components of a subculture.

To Lifers, the "prison subculture" is restricted to use of contraband such as drugs and alcohol and frequent involvement in fights and other forms of interpersonal violence which could result in death or bodily injury to another prisoner. Acceptance, or becoming engrossed in this subculture of violence is often voluntary and not the result of pressure from other prisoners. Often, involvement in this subculture of violence results from an inability to reconcile loneliness, depression, and anger. For example, and as one Lifer commented,

> ***Some guys get caught up in the prison subculture. They internalize the bitterness...They're very rebellious,***

> ***they start getting hateful--resentful...Some look for psychological escapes such as drugs...Once you're involved with the drugs and the violence associated with it, you spend your time hustling instead of trying to find yourself. A lot of guys who have been in maximum security, or are in for a long time, just give up. There's no cut and dry answer as to why it happens.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Lifers claim to successfully avoid fights and use of contraband in prison and view those who engage in such activity as the "cons" or "inmates." "I'm not one of them," was a common confession. They neglect to recognize the subcultural code as part of the prison subculture. Lifers subscribe to these rules, and live in a convict world for long periods of time. Still, they do not admit to involvement in the prison subculture or identify a point when they began to see themselves as "cons" or "inmates" after learning the prison code. They are "Lifers," an identity which is different from convict or inmate identity.

Some Lifers readily admitted to becoming involved in the prison subculture at one point in their sentence. This "subculture" however, encompassed the subculture of violence and use of contraband. Eventually, they reached a point where they "turned it around" or ended their involvement in rebellious, illegal activity in prison. According to them, they were no longer part of the prison "subculture." Even after this experience they spoke at length about the expectation to conform to the "code" of the prison environment and there was no mention of achieving convict identity.

Interviews with Lifers reveal that certain points during the life sentence can be identified as turning points to a convict

identity. In some cases, turning points cannot be recognized. However, the experience of most Lifers would suggest that they do experience turning points. Turning points varied among Lifers and in some cases Lifers experienced more than one turning point. For some, admission into the prison environment represented a point where, in terms of Lofland, old lines of action were disrupted. Lifers were faced with the necessity of doing something different with their lives. For other Lifers, the loss of an appeal represented a point where certain lines of action were amended.

Another turning point followed a lengthy period of dormancy and lethargy, which Lifers often referred to as "kicking back." Once Lifers realize their eventual release is contingent upon their institutional behaviour, they found it necessary to alter their prison activity, or inactivity. Unlike individuals serving short sentences, Lifers can be denied parole if they cannot convince the parole board that they are suitable candidates for release. Becoming involved in prison programs, and maintaining a prison record without incident, provides some surety for their eventual release.

Admission into prison represented a "turning point" to some Lifers. A life sentence was one Lifer's first experience with incarceration. Prior to the life sentence, he claimed never to have been charged or convicted of an offence. Nor had he served any time in a provincial or federal institution. At the time of the interview, he was in his 17th year of custody on a Life-10 sentence. His comments about his transfer into prison suggested

that he learned prison protocol at the point of admission into prison and during the initial stage of his sentence.

> ***You learn quickly how to do the time. You learn quickly what to do to survive and you don't get into anyone else's business...At the Haven [Millhaven], you never look in another man's cell. You keep your eyes ahead...You make sure you never rip off another con. You make your own time in jail. That's how you survive.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He learned and lives by the rules of the prison environment. He confirmed that if these rules are not observed, "You get into trouble." It was disappointing that he would not elaborate any further. However, his comment verified a need to adhere to prison protocol to avoid confrontations or problems with other prisoners. He continued,

> ***You have to fit into it and get along. In here, you see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

By "fitting in" he sought acceptance in the convict world which reduced threats to physical safety and survival. Still, he claimed to maintain a separation from the subculture by avoiding violence.

> ***You don't want to be around someone when that person goes down because that can affect how the guard sees you and how others [prisoners] see you.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Simply "being around" someone, according to this Lifer, meant "being involved." By avoiding violence and avoiding being seen around confrontational or violent incidents, he strived to protect a reputation with the prison administration and other

prisoners. That is, as a non-violent, model prisoner,[6] presumably, who did not have to be suspected or feared. However, he contradicted his claim to model prisoner status when he stated,

> ***Lifers in general have a problem with people who are doing short time. People that are doing short time, we make it very clear to them that they're to leave us alone, that we have nothing to lose if we have to settle a score. We would end it now.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

According to Lifers, short-time convicts are less concerned with managing themselves as model prisoners because of their inevitable release. While short-timers can be denied parole at a certain point in their sentence, once their warrant expires, correctional authorities are under an obligation to release them.[7] While Lifers do not ordinarily instigate arguments or fights with other prisoners, they feel an obligation to defend themselves in altercations with short-time prisoners.

This Lifer would not clarify how he would resolve a problem, or "settle a score" with a short termer. He was 6 1/2 years past his parole eligibility date which suggests that he has sought unacceptable methods of dispute resolution. Institutional infractions carry implications when being considered for passes, day parole, and full parole. The number of years this man has

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[6]A "model prisoner" is, as defined by Lifers, one who has no institutional charges, has cascaded through to minimum security in a timely fashion, has no prior convictions and has recommendations from staff, community organizations, friends and family.

[7]Any serious institutional infraction resulting in conviction and further sentencing would be the only exception.

served past his eligibility date is an indicator of his behaviour during the life sentence. At the time of the interview, however, he exhibited a strong commitment to obeying the prison code, obeying administration and avoiding conflict as a means of gaining his release. "I don't want to screw nothing up," he said. "I want to leave this place behind."

Admission into prison was also a point for another Lifer who described himself as a "square john." Earlier, he was quoted as "feeling confident only when you're locked in your cell." He is also a first-time federal prisoner. He claimed that association with Lifers who shared his interests, and avoided the violent subculture in prison, helped him to avoid the subculture of violence when he was admitted to the institution.

Again, this Lifer's definition of the prison subculture is restricted to violence, and use of contraband, which he claimed to successfully avoid. However, his use of prison argot, by referring to himself as a "square john," suggests that he has internalized a commitment to the internal code (Clemmer 1958; Sykes 1958; and Sykes and Messinger 1960). He also remarked,

> ***You had to adhere to the peer pressure no matter how wrong it was. You had to turn a blind eye. You had to make sure you were not seen interacting with any security and administration. The peer pressure was extreme.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He, therefore, learned and lives by prison rules. Rules, and a prescription for behaviour which differ from the life he lived on the outside. The prison world is different, because he is a "square john," not a "criminal." "Square johns" according to

Irwin (1987,32-33) are "conventional" persons, who are sent to prison. Ordinarily, they have had no prior contact with criminals, or criminal behaviour. When they come into contact with prison, they meet people who systematically engage in crime, and who also uphold a system of beliefs, values and an ideology which justifies crime. Even though "square johns" have been convicted and sentenced to prison, they maintain they are quite different from other "criminals" they confront.

He described his life prior to the incarceration as never having been in conflict with the law and never incarcerated. In his own words, he "bought into the suburban dream." This "suburban dream" included a white-collar profession, a house in the suburbs, summer home, two cars in the garage, health club memberships, and various material possessions. In prison, he sought friendships among individuals he perceived to be like him.

> ***They came from the same background. They had never been in prison before. They had no criminal past and they were all sentenced to Life.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He made no reference to contact with unconventional "criminal" types before and after incarceration. He found the prison environment an absolute contrast to the outside world with which he was familiar. "It was a terrifying experience for a square john," he said. Apparently, associating with other "square johns" helped him feel safer, avoid problem situations, and avoid the prison subculture. However, his admission to "adhering to the peer pressure" indicated he was aware of the rules of a convict world, and non-conformity to those rules would seal his fate.

From the beginning of his sentence, 15 years ago, another Lifer involved himself in educational and vocational activities to avoid violent prison situations. By doing this, he was able to "survive psychologically and physically." He took university courses, completed a B.A.(Hon.), worked on the recreation gang[8] and in the canteen. He also organized and participated in a "Con Walk."[9] All of these activities, especially school, were, according to him, a means of "escape."

> ***I didn't have to think about what was going on in prison.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

By maintaining active involvement in prison programs, whether political or recreational, from the beginning of his sentence, this man established his own means of combatting problems inherent in the prison environment and avoiding the violent subculture. Nevertheless, his awareness of the internal protocol was demonstrated when he stated,

> ***If someone gets stabbed in prison you can't help. You have to blunt your emotions and become really hard. You realize how cheap life is in prison. You begin to wonder whether you're going to survive physically. You realize how cold you become.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He did not acknowledge coming to identify himself as a

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[8]This is a committee of prisoners responsible for organizing recreational activities, such as baseball games.

[9]The "Con-Walk" is organized annually by Lifers at a minimum security institution in Kingston and supervised by CSC staff. Participants are on day parole. They are escorted on a route from Cornwall to Kingston. One-half of the group walks while the other half solicits donations door to door in the community for muscular dystrophy. At the end of each day they return to the institution.

"convict" or "inmate," as a result of conformity to the prison rules. Nor did he define a point when he began "blunting his emotions" and becoming "cold." His lifestyle prior to prison might suggest that he was prepared to undertake life in a volatile, unpredictable environment. He was an executive member of a well-known motorcycle club before prison. We have learned from Wolf (1991) that outlaw bikers adopt attitudes of toughness, independence, aggressiveness, and self-reliance. Attitudes which, according to this Lifer, are necessary to endure the prison experience.

Finally, he described the prison environment as "a community--a community like Beirut."

> ***Everyone has their own area staked out...Tricks happen. There's an ongoing power struggle.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

This "community," as he described it, would logically approximate a biker subculture. Wolf (1991) confirms that territoriality is characteristic of the outlaw biker subculture and competition for reputation, power, and prestige is prevalent. To this Lifer, unlike other Lifers who were allied with bikers on the outside, prison was a foreign world. One where he had to "learn to survive at all costs."

Some Lifers readily admitted to becoming "caught up" in the subculture when they were first admitted to prison. In most cases, they had served time in either provincial or federal institutions. One Lifer who had served six years in federal and provincial institutions prior to the life sentence commented,

> ***The reality of the life sentence was not on my mind when I first came in. I refused to accept it.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Not accepting the "reality of the life sentence," for this Lifer, resulted in his becoming involved in prison subcultural activities such as an escape, a hostile attitude, and violent behaviour towards other prisoners and administration. By adopting aggressive, violent behaviour prisoners are recognized as tough and strong which affords a sense of personal safety. In addition to his aggressiveness, he also claimed to have maintained a drug habit and dealt with the life sentence, for a substantial period of his incarceration, by staying high on drugs.

The prison world was not something to which this Lifer needed to become accustomed. He admitted to knowing how to do the time. That is, he knew he had to mind his own business, other prisoners' space, and that he could not intervene if he witnessed a stabbing or beating. Hence, conscious adjustment to the prison world, for him, was not necessary.

This Lifer's "turning point," compares to the experience of several other Lifers. That is, after a lengthy period of rebellion and hostility. To reiterate, once Lifers realize their eventual release is contingent upon their institutional behaviour, they alter their prison activity, or inactivity. Hence, he saw a substance abuse program, as an opportunity to "impress" the parole board. He confessed,

> ***I went to recovery for the sole purpose of using the program to help me get out of jail. I was going to look at it, see about it and show them how well I was. When I got there everything that I heard, I couldn't argue***

> ***with them. They basically told me about my problem.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

According to him, continued participation in this substance abuse program, helped him to withdraw from the prison subculture and "just putting in time."

Another Lifer admitted to being "petrified" when he first came into the system. He also expressed a need to "fit in," or adapt to the prison world. A world which he claimed was foreign to him. He served 2 1/2 years provincial time prior to the Life sentence and had completed 18 years in prison on a triple life sentence at the time of the interview. His method of "fitting in" involved "running around with a weapon," and getting "into a head space that you have to do whatever's necessary to stay alive." He had witnessed a brutal stabbing during the first few days of his incarceration. Drugs and weapons became his means of adaptation and "fitting in" to a very hostile environment.

> ***For some, that adaptation is through violence. For some its drugs.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He apparently chose both and after prolonged involvement in this subculture of violence, he experienced a "turning point," when

> ***I began to feel myself tiring, or becoming burned out-- I just couldn't do it. I realized I just couldn't take this anymore. There's got to be another way.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

The "lines of action" he selected were not working for him any longer. He ended his use of drugs and aggressive behaviour. He has now set up alternative coping mechanisms by joining a Christian fellowship group where he met a woman, who eventually

became his wife. He describes his wife as his "best friend" and she visits often. He also began courses with the Royal Military College.

Reasons for "turning it around" vary from simply "running out of steam" to release-contingent conformity.[10] However, regardless of their changed behaviours, Lifers continue to respect the prison code. In spite of abandoning the drug and violent subculture, Lifers stressed a loyalty to the "code" that would provide a measure of security and survival. They acknowledged, "minding another person's space" and "keeping to yourself" is "the way you survive in here."

Another Lifer acknowledged getting "involved in the prison politics" for the first couple of years he was in prison. This resulted in his confinement for three years in segregation and being charged with manslaughter. It was difficult to engage this man in conversation. Often, he would respond to questions very abruptly. He could not account for his involvement in this subculture, except that "it just happened." When he began working in the canteen, the influence of the people he worked with helped him dissociate from the violent subculture. He said,

> ***People in the Canteen were not like (others with whom he initially associated). They were a group of people who were involved in institutional needs.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

According to this Lifer, individuals with whom he associated

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[10]This essentially means that they abandon lethargic, unproductive or violent behaviour once they realize that their eventual release is contingent on their prison behaviour.

when he was first incarcerated lacked motivation. He described them as individuals who would not cause trouble, but were "introverted," "concerned only with themselves," and "tended to stay in their own little group." The influence of the people he worked with in the canteen, together with his confinement in segregation, when he had time to reflect on his actions, motivated him to abandon problem behaviour and pursue constructive activities. These activities included working on the Inmate Committee[11] and recreation gang, planning socials, and weight lifting.

As a result, he claimed to begin "breaking down the barriers" and no longer having to "play the tough guy." Notwithstanding his claim to having "turned it around," further comments suggested that the subcultural rules of the prison environment still governed his actions.

> ***I still have a tendency to gear my activities around the politics of the system. I won't hesitate to chop someone if I had to...I will defend myself against anyone at any cost...You know there's shit going on. If anyone tries to drag me down, I'll boot them one.***
> (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

His admission resembles that part of the subcultural "code" which demands that prisoners, "show courage and maintain integrity when faced with aggressive behaviour by staff and other

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[11]The Inmate Committee, is a committee made up of prisoners who will represent one or more prisoners at meetings with the administration. Prisoners who are repeatedly turned down for passes or denied certain privileges in the institutions might bring their case to the Inmate Committee. The Committee in turn will bring the complaint to the attention of the appropriate administrative forum.

inmates" (Sykes and Messinger 1960,5-9). His dissociation from violence and/or unproductive behaviour did not prevent him from respecting the demands of the prison subcultural code.

In fact, other Lifers who abandoned violent behaviour and/or drug and alcohol abuse in prison evidenced a continuous commitment to prison subcultural rules.

> ***You've got to keep your head up and stay out of other people's business. You look from side to side all the time to make sure no one is creeping up on you...At the snap of your fingers, something could happen...You just keep walking. You don't even let on like you know what happened, because if you do, you could be the next one to go.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

This Lifer was heavily involved in drug abuse as a means of coping with 2 1/2 years of confinement in maximum security. His drug habit continued when he was transferred to medium security until his parents won custody of his daughter after a lengthy court battle. The success of this custody suit gave him "some hope to get on the straight and narrow." He fills his time in prison now by working in landscaping at Prison for Women and the Regional Staff College, learning to use computers, playing baseball and racquetball, watching movies, reading and playing cards. Notwithstanding these changes, he also maintains compliance with prison subcultural rules.

Other Lifers credited involvement in prison programs as a means of "turning it around." One Lifer who "adopted attitudes that would terrify anyone" during his incarceration claimed to begin "breaking down barriers" at a point in his sentence when he started into prison programs. These attitudes, according to him,

resulted from his exposure to extraordinary stress and tension in "Canada's toughest joints." He commented,

> ***If someone tried to kill or stab me...they better be goddam successful because if they didn't they'd have to deal with me. I hurt a lot of people when I was at (name of prison)...I was one of the wheels in (name of prison). I was a highly regarded inmate. I was tougher. If you want to get to me, you better kill me.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He experienced a turning point when he began "breaking down barriers" and "acting human again." As stated earlier, participating in programs helped with this transition. He commented,

> ***Programs helped me make the switch from this hardcore attitude to someone who was a lot less defensive. It was basically from getting involved in work and starting to let down the defences.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

With the exception of his work on the Inmate Committee, he did not elaborate on any other programs, such as anger management or cognitive skills which might have helped him "shake the attitude." Nor did he offer a reason for beginning prison programs. He was determined, in any event, to convince the researcher of his pleasing demeanour. However, his transition from this "hard core attitude" became less convincing when he stated,

> ***I'm more an inmate than anyone here. I have to be tough on them. I am stronger and ready to do business whenever I have to. How I'm going to come out of it I don't know. I don't know when I'm getting out and I don't know how I'm going to deal with this attitude. I'm just going to have to turn it right around. I have mellowed out a bit, but the attitude can come back again at the drop of a hat. I was actually quite suave and an excellent negotiator before I came in and now its fuck off and die.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison,

August 1992)

Maintaining an image of toughness and being ready to do business [not backing down to an aggressor] are representative of the prison subcultural code. Like other Lifers, the shift from the subculture of violence to more constructive positive prison behaviour did not eradicate his need to live by prison rules. Even after becoming involved in prison programs, he continued to seek recognition as a very strong, fearless prisoner. Someone "ready to do business" whenever it was necessary.

Transfer from maximum to medium security was a turning point for another Lifer who, during his incarceration, claimed to have developed a "prisoner of war" attitude. Now in his 15th year of incarceration, he claimed,

> ***When I started coming out of this prisoner of war mentality, and transferred to a medium security institution, it gave me the first hope that I would get outside the front door. At this point, it was six years until my sentence review so I started to look around to see what I could do and I decided to get to school.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1993)

With a sense of confidence and commitment, he explained to the researcher,

> ***Guys come in here and think that they can just cruise through their sentence. The reality is that they can't. They have to really work at getting through the system by applying themselves in a manner that will help them get transfers, ETAs, and what not. I have realized this and I am working towards that.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1993)

Now, he devotes an extensive amount of time to schoolwork. In addition to his studies, he finds time to work in the canteen and on the Inmate Committee. He uses his reading and writing

skills to assist other prisoners with applications for parole, passes, or any other letters or documents they need to prepare. He is also a member of the Lifers group.

The experience with "turning points" so far, has focused on admission to the institution and other points in the Lifers' sentence where they have actively pursued constructive changes. It was also discovered that a lost appeal could be a point relevant to conversion.

By the time most Lifers reached the institution, often an appeal was underway or being contemplated. Either the guilty verdict or the sentence was under appeal. An appeal of the sentence was an attempt to reduce the number of years which must be served before parole eligibility. Only a small number of these appeals, among those who were interviewed, were successful. While none of the convictions were overturned, some of those who appealled their sentence had their parole eligibility periods reduced.

One Lifer, now 15 years into a Life-25 sentence, summed up the experience of a lost appeal. He commented,

> ***Avoidance seems to take place during certain periods of transition--like when they first come in and after the appeal period--especially if the appeal is lost. There seems to be a tendency for them to withdraw until they realize that they're there and they've got to do something. They've got to make something of themselves.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

When commenting on his own personal experience with an unsuccessful appeal, he continued,

> ***I woke up one day and I realized I was in kind of a rut. I looked in the mirror and realized I was in kind***

> ***of a rut. It finally hit me that I had to do a whole lot of time and I had better start doing something about it.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Lapsing into a rut was often described as depression, laziness, and/or becoming rebellious. Eventually, this Lifer learned to appreciate the significance of the life sentence which helped to pull him out of the rut. He credits his motivation to change to the suggestions of a psychologist. The psychologist recommended school as a suitable starting point. At the time of the interview he was 1 1/2 credits short of a B.A. in sociology. Organizing prison events, in addition to his guitar and lifting weights, also helped him to "pull out of the rut." Now, he claims, "the key to doing time is keeping busy. If you lay around your mind is going to go."

A lost appeal is very devastating to Lifers. For some, reaction is more dramatic than others. Facing a Life-25 sentence and still confined to medium security after 14 years, one Lifer reported,

> ***After the appeal was lost I felt like I had to escape. I wasn't going to do 25 years.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He did escape and as a consequence, when he was returned to custody, he was confined to a special handling unit. Although other Lifers, who were confined to segregation for extended periods of time, have been found to return to the population with a more aggressive, hostile demeanor, this Lifer claimed that "being in the SHU [Special Handling Unit] really quieted me down." During his time in the SHU he reached a point where he

realized that the longer he remained rebellious the more time he would have to serve. As a consequence, he was protective of his chances of gaining timely release.

> ***I have the time in now and I have my 15-year review coming up. If I don't get it, and I should, I only have 10 years left.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Lifers who had served time in prison before the life sentence also recalled their experience with a lost appeal. One Lifer, serving life on a second degree murder conviction, remembered,

> ***I was always hoping that the appeal would be successful, but it got shot down. At that point, I resigned myself to the fact that I'm a Lifer and I gotta do it.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Losing the appeal had no recognizable emotional impact on him. He did not react by staging an escape. Nor did he claim to have lapsed into a rut. Losing the appeal, however, seemed to motivate him to begin school, work on the recreation gang, and take part in other vocational activities as an exercise in helping him forget the situation he was in.

Other Lifers who had pursued model prisoner status to protect their chances of a successful appeal, continued efforts to maintain this status even if the appeal was lost. The lost appeal was not a point when they lapsed into rebellious or unproductive behaviour. Although one Lifer claimed not to have become rebellious, or lapse into a period of "dead" or "heavy hanging" time after his appeal was lost, he still felt he was "stuck with the 25 years." He continued,

*I had seven years in with eight more to go and then I will have my 15-year review. I can hang on and I managed to get through the next 8 years. You try to find some interests...you realize this is going to be your home for the next eight years so I'm going to try and better the living conditions.* (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

After the lost appeal, he continued in his involvement with the Inmate Committee, studying computer programming, and building furniture. He also used his skills in electronics to repair televisions and radios for other prisoners.

From the discussion, several points in a life sentence can be identified as "turning points." When Lifers entered the prison world, they emphasized having to learn the rules of the prison environment. For many, especially those who had never been incarcerated, these rules, or prescriptions for living were different than what they were used to on the outside world. Old lines of action they were accustomed to were disrupted. They were faced with the necessity of learning a new manner of living, geared for life in prison.

Prison was not as foreign to Lifers who were allied with outlaw biker subcultures, many of whom had been state-raised or had led criminal lifestyles before the life sentence. Admission into prison for these inmates, as well as for Lifers who had served prison time before the life sentence, was not a significant turning point. Many admitted to knowing how to "do the time," and went about it when they arrived in prison.

For some Lifers, a lost appeal was a point when they became hopeless about their future and lapsed into a rut of lethargic,

rebellious behaviour. Another turning point was reached when they came to appreciate the significance of the life sentence. That is, as a Lifer, their eventual release is contingent upon a prison record without incident, and involvement in vocational, academic, and rehabilitative programs. Lifers, unlike short-term prisoners do not have a warrant expiry date, only an eligibility date for parole. Parole authorities are under no obligation to release them once they reach parole eligibility. Pursuing and maintaining "model prisoner" status, provides some guaranty for eventual release.

This pattern was also identified among Lifers who did not experience a lost appeal. Several Lifers reported involvement with drugs and violence at one point in their sentence. They too, reached a point when they realized their eventual release is contingent upon "model prisoner" activity. At that point, they abandoned unproductive, violent behaviour and pursued more constructive activities, such as work, school, and substance abuse programs.

Lifers' experience with turning points, does not demonstrate the emergence or presence of a "convict" identity. In fact, by obeying the prison subcultural code, and avoiding the subculture of violence in prison, Lifers were confident that they had not achieved a "convict" or "inmate" identity. Even those who abandoned violent behaviour and use contraband did not report a point when they began to identify themselves as "convicts." In both cases, "Lifer" as master status prevails.

According to Lofland, "turning points" only predispose pre-converts to conversion. In the next stage, pre-converts bonding with converts was necessary to achieve full conversion. Affective bonding meant pre-converts developed ties with converts, accepted opinions of the group, and agreed to be judged by the standards of the group. Affective bonding was investigated with Lifers in the context of "friendships," which are discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 8

### Affective Bonds

> ***You have acquaintances. You don't have friends.***
> (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Affective bonding was discussed with Lifers in terms of "friendships" with other prisoners inside prison. This facet of their everyday life is important to our understanding of conversion. In studies of identity conversion, researchers have identified development of affective bonds between pre-converts and converts.

According to Lofland (1977), affective bonding meant pre-converts developed ties with Divine Precept members. Also, once they accepted the opinions of the converts, the final point of conversion was to have taken place. According to Chang (1989), affective bonds developed from collective activities such as mini victories and recreational events.

Greil and Rudy (1983) noted that when new AA members began to hold positive views of the group, affective bonds developed. New members became willing to be judged by the standards of the group and accepted the alcoholic identity. Whereas Greil and Rudy (1983) discussed loyalty to the AA group or organization as a whole, Chang emphasized more personal bonding between staff and residents.

Lifers "bond" with the prison world to the extent that they adopt, without question, a "code of behaviour" necessary to survive. Lifers also develop friendships or "bond" with other Lifers and/or short-time prisoners. Unlike the religious cult,

"self-savers," and AA, where bonding is encouraged, prison discourages bonds or friendships which are always suspect. The process of developing friendships with other prisoners is slow, strategic, and cautious. Overall, Lifers report keeping their social circles small and concentrate on friendships only with other Lifers. The following patterns or processes of developing friendships in prison were discovered in the research.

1. **Lifers frequently restrict their association or friendships to other Lifers.**

Of the 40 Lifers interviewed, 23 mentioned pursuing friendships with other Lifers only. Frequently, the reason for this is attributable to the potential stability of the friendship. As one Lifer states,

> ***I keep to myself a lot. Only Lifers are my friends. When I first came in, I became friends with people my own age, no matter what they were in for or how much time they were doing, because I wanted to have some contact with people. It seemed that I got to be friends with people who were coming and going all the time. After awhile, I decided I couldn't do it anymore. Now if I'm going to be friends with somebody, I'm going to be friends with somebody in my community [Lifers]. The guy I'm closest to lives across the hall. I have 18 years in and he's got 10. He's doing Life-25.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

The revolving door on friendship with short-time prisoners,[12] leads Lifers to strategically select friendships which have potential longevity.

> ***I talk with Lifers mostly because most other people are gone in a few years. It's kinda hard to make friends if they're not around a lot.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

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[12]"Short-timers" are prisoners who are serving a federal prison sentence, but have not been sentenced to life.

Other Lifers confirmed that tney associate with Lifers only because "they're there for a long time," or "they're not going anywhere fast." Friendship with other Lifers represents a need to establish continuous and uninterrupted relationships.

For those Lifers who did select friendships with short-timers, the reasons were explained as "just happening" or preferable because short-timers are easier to get along with.

> ***A short-timer is not as hardened and easier to get along with...A lot of the Lifers are not coming out of the rut...They live inside their heads to survive. Basically what they do is set up coping skills and withdraw. They can't express their emotions...Right now, all most of the Lifers do is watch TV and do drugs.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Moreover, Lifers often commented that prisoners serving short sentences feared them because of the circumstances of the crime. They appear to use their "Lifer" status as an object of control in these friendships. One Lifer suggested that friendship with short-timers is better.

> ***They (short-timers) respect where I'm going and they respect where I'm coming from, because of the stature of the sentence. They are apt to listen and take me more serious.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

There is a suggestion in this statement that friendship with short-timers for Lifers is a rewarding experience because of the status differential.

2. **Lifers restrict their friendships to one, two, or three others. Other prisoners are merely "acquaintances."**

Among the 40 Lifers interviewed in this study, 21 emphasized having only "a few close friends," while other prisoners and/or Lifers are merely "acquaintances." Lifers would "be polite to,"

or "just say hi" to acquaintances. Other Lifers admitted to having "no friends in prison, just acquaintances." This pattern is consistent among Lifers imprisoned for the first time and Lifers who had been incarcerated prior to the life sentence.

One Lifer who has been in prison for seven years said,

> ***You can be friends on a very superficial level, but you consider them (Lifers) more your friends. It's not really tight but there's a handful of us guys--about 10--that work together and will joke around and we just get along really well. When you're in jail, it's hard to say anything about friendships. You do have it. But it's not like the type of friends you have on the street. A lot of guys I don't talk to. Guys like, I don't know their situation. I don't know the particulars and I don't want to. If they needed something though, they can ask for it. If I'm in the head space to help them, I will.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Being friends on a "superficial level" is often the result of "not being able to trust anyone." Suspicion about loyalty causes Lifers to keep some prisoners at a distance, and regard them only as "acquaintances."

> ***It takes a lot of years for me to get to know a person. I've been burned a couple of times by people I trusted and I won't trust anyone right away anymore. There's 560 guys in [prison]. I can count on one hand who I consider my friends.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

In fact, Lifers often reported having "superficial friends" or "acquaintances" rather than "real friends" in prison. Lifers do trust "real friends" unconditionally. That is, they rarely expressed worry about "real friends" stealing from them or breaking a confidence (ratting). Trust is only established after a long process of "testing" the friendship.

> ***You learn to trust people [prisoners] by telling them***

> ***things and if it doesn't get back to you from someone else, you know they can keep a secret.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1991)

Speaking from a medium security institution, after 15 years on a Life sentence, another Lifer commented,

> ***You don't have too many friends. Real friends, I'd say I have about three or four that I believe are my friends. I have met at least a couple thousand people.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

This Lifer went on to comment that having "friends" in prison only means more frequent as opposed to intense communication. In fact, in almost every case, having "close" or "closer" friends only means more frequent as opposed to intense communication. Even "close friends" do not engage in serious discussion of problems. In prison, admitting to personal problems such as loneliness is interpreted as an expression of weakness. Showing emotion is antithetical to the expectation of the prison code which demands that prisoners maintain courage and integrity in the presence of other prisoners.

The same Lifer who claimed to seek friendships among short-timers, who were apparently "not as hardened as Lifers," also confirmed,

> ***There's no such thing as friends in prison, only acquaintances and people that you hang around with more.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

"There's nobody," he claimed, short-timer or Lifer, that he would tell his personal feelings to and that he would trust unconditionally. In fact, several Lifers reported similar approaches to friendships.

The perception Lifers have towards friendships in prison

illustrates a distortion of free life. It is not uncommon for people in free society to have only a few "close" friends, to test loyalty of those friendships, to have been "burned" by friends, or take "a lot of years to get to know someone." As such, characteristics of friendships in prison can be compared to friendships on the street.

3. **Friendships develop slowly and Lifers seek friendships strategically and carefully.**

Often, friendships develop with other prisoners that Lifers perceive to be like themselves. As one Lifer noted,

> ***I've made friends with people who are basically like me.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prisoner, August 1992)

These Lifers developed friendships, often during the first few years of the sentence, with individuals with similar social backgrounds and interests. One Lifer commented,

> ***There were several other guys just like me who banded together. We were interested in church and movies and getting involved in as many activities as we could.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prisoner, August 1992)

Some sought friendships with others who shared the same cultural or ethnic backgrounds. This cultural alliance can take the form of "cliques" or "gangs" in prison.

> ***You want cliques, we got cliques...Everywhere you look you have colour cliques like blacks...you have white guys that hang out in two's or three's, the Italians, the Vietnamese, the drag-queens. They stick together. If you do something wrong to one of their guys then you meet up with them in the yard one day and they deal with the situation.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

It makes sense that Lifers would congregate and ally themselves with a clique. Minton (1971,32-36) found that cliques

in prison provide emotional and physical security. Individuals in cliques feel confident that they have friends to back them up in the event they offend or are offended by members of other cliques. Further, acceptance by peers is important to potential clique members. By learning the values of the clique, new members are quickly accepted into the clique. Again, the practice of making friends with people who share similar cultural and social characteristics is not unique to the prison environment.

Also, among first-timers, there were some who had established friendships with individuals they knew prior to prison. One Lifer, now 15 years into a Life-25 sentence, was sentenced with six others. They were all friends and belonged to the same motorcycle group on the outside. They continued their alliance in prison. This Lifer commented,

> ***We had other friends (in prison), other guys from other groups or clubs. But we kept mostly to ourselves and stayed out of prison politics...We were lucky in a sense, it was an organization. We had rules set that were different from other rules in our common room.***
> (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Strategic selection of new members to a group of friends is accomplished through a formal process of election into the group. He continued,

> ***Before anyone was let in to the group, they had to be voted in. We watched out for one another. If someone was having trouble, we would talk to them about it.***
> (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Seeking friendships at the beginning of a life sentence is risky to Lifers. One Lifer explained that little is known about other prisoners. Without information it is possible to find

yourself associating with someone whose crime or behaviour you despise--so you stay away.

> ***There are so many stool pigeons and rape hounds. Because of the fact that you don't want to be seen associating with these people, and that you despise them, you have to be very cautious about who you associate with. If you don't know and you're not told what this other person is like, you stay away so you avoid trouble.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

"Stool pigeons," are prisoners known to breach a confidence. "Rape hounds," on the other hand, are prisoners serving time for sex offences. These prisoners are despised and rejected by other prisoners. Their physical safety is often in jeopardy in the prison population and they kept their offence secret to protect themselves. Occasionally, their crime becomes known to other prisoners. They can be transferred to protective custody, as a result. Until Lifers can verify that someone is not a "stool pigeon" or "rape hound," they stay to themselves and avoid making friends.

Lifers who served time prior to the life sentence were less likely to cultivate friendships. Frequently, they claimed to have "acquaintances" not "friends." One Lifer, after 23 years of custody, preferred acquaintances over friends as a means of survival. He remarked,

> ***I don't hang around with nobody steady...If you get close to someone and you try to help them out you could get killed yourself and if they get hurt or killed, it becomes an emotional issue which you have to deal with which isn't very comfortable. I guess they don't want to have to grieve over the loss of a friend. A few times I did try to help someone out. I ended up almost getting killed myself.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Keeping friendships at a distance, then, is a survival mechanism. Lifers often confirmed that trying to help someone who is being beaten or stabbed would result in them "being the next one." They ignore or deny seeing such a situation. By doing so, they protect their own safety. It is easier to ignore the beating or stabbing of someone they consider an "acquaintance" rather than a "friend."

Another Lifer commented,

> ***At first, I wouldn't try to get to know anyone. You don't try to make friends quickly in here. I was my own person and I was not imposing on anyone. If I met someone and they tried to become friends with me really quickly, I was very leery about them.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prisoner, August 1992)

When prompted to explain why he would be "leery" of someone who tried to make friends quickly, he responded,

> ***You really have to learn to trust someone and you just don't get involved that quickly.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Making friends begins with a process of learning to trust. Trusting other prisoners, even Lifers, means feeling confident that they would not be robbed or have a confidence breached. However, it has taken him 10 out of 12 years on a Life-14 sentence to get to the point where he would trust other prisoners, even some Lifers. Eventually, he was able to make friends with a few Lifers. However, he claimed,

> ***Most people are my acquaintances and I only have three people that I consider my friends. A lot of people are my acquaintances. I know them. I'm nice to them. I say hi to them.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Maintaining few friendships is less risky. The risk of

having a confidence breached, associating with sex offenders or "stool pigeons," having to assist someone in trouble, keeps Lifers from establishing more than two or three friendships. Further, by maintaining only a few, reliable friendships, their own personal safety is not jeopardized.

Other Lifers described another factor involved in developing friendships. One Lifer who claimed earlier that friendships in prison mean more frequent rather than intense communication, described his method of pursuing friendships in prison,

> ***In order to make friends, you have to look at the way he acts. If he has class, then I'll hang around with him.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

"Class" to this Lifer is "someone who isn't always drunk or in trouble." He continued,

> ***I don't want to hang around with anyone like that [troublemakers]. I hang around with people who are quiet...I don't want to mix in with some of these guys. When I first got here, you find out who the guys are and who the intelligent ones are. My co-accused has been with me. I was very lucky because I knew him.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1993)

The "intelligent ones" and the "quiet ones," according to this Lifer, are prisoners who do not engage in problem behaviour in prison. Clean friendships symbolized a type of guarantee for their eventual release. They often expressed that association with known troublemakers would caste suspicion on them that they are troublemakers. Given that their release is contingent on their prison behaviour, they segregate themselves from problem individuals. The selective choice of associates in prison is a means of protecting efforts to achieve "model prisoner" status.

When reading Lofland (1977), Greil and Rudy (1983), and Chang (1980) one does not get the impression that pre-converts had to be cautious and selective when entering the group or organization and pursuing new friendships. This seems to be the case, however, with Lifers. Developing friendships without first learning something about the individual is risky. Lifers must be careful to avoid associating with "sex offenders," "stool pigeons," trouble-makers, or "drag queens."

Lifers develop friendships with others who share similar circumstances. They frequently associate with other Lifers serving long sentences and sometimes on the basis shared cultural, ethnic, socio-economic, or subcultural status.

Compared to affective bonds that Greil and Rudy (1983,15) discovered among members of AA, Lifers were not invited into the prison population with open arms. Members of AA gave personal attention, support, and acceptance to newcomers and made new members feel they were among friends instantly. Lifers often reported up to ten years passing before they felt they could trust anyone in prison enough to become friends with them.

Finally, bonding occurs in terms of Lofland, in that Lifers accept standards or terms of behaviour imposed by the group, or prison population. For instance, Lifers will not associate with individuals who are rejected by the Lifer and general prison population and, they discourage friendships in order to avoid feeling obliged to help out in a violent situation such as a stabbing, beating, or piping.

Membership in Lifers' groups in prison is also a forum for developing "affective bonds." One of the first groups Lifers become involved with in prison is the Lifers' group. With the exception of Millhaven and Bath, a Lifers' group meets at each of the medium and minimum institutions on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. In all cases, Lifers' groups have been started by Lifers, for Lifers. Only Lifers may attend.

The groups' central mandate is to provide an avenue to pass on information to Lifers, organize family socials and other activities for Lifers. They are not a conduit of communication or socialization among Lifers. Twenty-six of the Lifers interviewed for this study were members of a Lifers group.

Some Lifers felt that members of the Lifers' groups are a "closer knit group" than Lifers who did not participate or other "short-time" prisoners. One woman described the members of her Lifers' group as "joined at the head." Few male Lifers acknowledged a sense of comradery and commitment among members of Lifers' groups. However, one Lifer agreed that Lifers in general, not just those in the Lifers' group are a cohesive community. He stated,

> ***If one is struggling with a long-term sentence, since we are around that person a lot, you pick up the mood swings. We, being a very concerned community, will help console individuals [Lifers] who are having trouble. We all hit highs and lows.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Another Lifer claimed that Lifers, in the Lifers' group, or a group as a whole, are "closer, but not close." He acknowledged

a certain solidarity among Lifers' group members and "10+ group"[13] members only because everyone is doing either a life sentence or ten years.

> ***They're [Lifers and 10+] closer, but that's only because they see each other at the group.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

"Closeness," then, means only physical proximity to other Lifers or 10+ members at meetings. "No one talked much" with other prisoners, he said. They are careful of what they tell others and they do not share anything personal with another member of the group because, "it's a sign of weakness to show emotion." As discussed earlier, showing weakness contravenes the prison "code." This tendency to abstain from discussing personal problems is typical of masculine culture in general, and not unique to the prison environment.

Several other Lifers felt that membership in Lifers' groups is not an indication that Lifers are better friends than those who are not members of a Lifers' group. For example,

> ***They [Lifers] were together because they were there, not because they were good buddies with anybody else.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Examining an agenda of a Lifers' group meeting confirms that Lifers attend meetings for reasons other than socializing. Primarily, Lifers' group meetings represent a conduit for passing on information of a political nature affecting Lifers. An agenda of a Lifers group could include such items as,

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[13]The 10+ group is for inmates serving 10 years or more, or a Life sentence.

1. Informing Lifers of amendments to penitentiary legislation or administrative procedures;

2. Informing Lifers of programs and activities proposed by Correctional Service of Canada. At the time of this research, concern over the spread of AIDS in prison was at issue. Lifers were approaching CSC with a view to having condoms and bleach kits (to disinfect needles) available to them, and other prisoners.

3. Also, at the time of this research, In-Reach workers attended Lifers groups to inform Lifers of the In-Reach service and the progress of the Windsor Life Line House.

Few opportunities for informal socializing at Lifers' meeting exist. The only observable social aspect of the meetings was interaction with outside visitors. Students and/or members of the John Howard Society and a Citizens' Advisory Committee in Kingston are usually present at a Lifers' meeting. During breaks and informal gatherings prior to and following the meeting, Lifers engaged in conversation with visitors. Still, some Lifers feel that attending Lifers' group meetings provides an opportunity to socialize.

> ***The Lifers group is mostly a social group and in that group you know each other better because you have been around. There's a closer contact between them because they've been around...We don't hang together...I have no real Lifer friends who I am close to.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

His comments leave the impression that the Lifers' group did provide an opportunity for socialization. The closeness referred to is related to the length of time Lifers have been in prison, or attended Lifers' meetings. Also, he was adamant, when discussing friendships in prison, that prisoners only have "acquaintances," not "friends."

Other complaints about the Lifers' group meetings indicate

an absence of commitment or comradery among Lifers. One Lifer, a member and chairperson of a Lifers' group, commented,

> ***There are 140 Lifers in here. You're lucky if you get 20 at a group.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Thus, according to him, there is only a greater level of respect among Lifers in the Lifers' group than among the general population of Lifers.

It is evident that developing friendships is difficult, lengthy, and sometimes risky. It would seem also that Lifers' groups offered little or no alternative to risky companionship in the general prison population. Attending Lifer's group meetings is only a "political" and not a "social" exercise. Expanding one's social circle in the Lifers' group is unlikely.

In line with the findings of Chang (1989), Greil and Rudy (1983), and Lofland (1977), collective activity in prison is an avenue for developing ties with others who share similar circumstances. Also, bonding extended to Lifers' acceptance of the standards and opinions of the group. The standards of the prison environment have been described as the subcultural "code." A code which prisoners had to live by to survive. By respecting the premises of the prison "code," they agree to accept the standards of the prison environment.

In Chapter 6, the experience of Lifers entering the institution illustrated their acceptance of these standards or rules. Accepting the standards of the prison environment and using this code as a means of guiding their interaction with

others is, in Lofland's terms, a form of bonding. Further, the scrutiny involved in building relationships for Lifers may in fact increase the bonding.

The influence of extra-institutional, or outside acquaintances and relatives are also instrumental to conversion, according to Lofland (1977). This influence, as it relates to the experience of Lifers, forms the next area of discussion.

## CHAPTER 9

### Extra-Institutional Bonds

> ***You don't call home and tell your mother that someone got murdered in front of you today because she's just going to worry. You just have to deal with it.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

In existing research on identity transformation, a convert's extra-cult or extra-institutional bonds were found to impact on eventual conversion. "Extra-cult" or "extra-institutional" affective bonds were those significant acquaintances in the pre-convert's life such as friends and family members. These individuals could impose a positive or negative impact on conversion into the cult or organization.

According to Lofland, geographical distance and weak ties to family members facilitated conversion. Dissenting relatives and/or friends who pressured aspiring converts to reconsider or abandon efforts to become full members of a religious cult circumvented conversion. Thus, until such time as a pre-convert severed ties with dissenting family members or friends, full conversion was not possible.

In Chang (1989), subjects converted to a new self-concept as "self-saver." In Greil and Rudy (1983) subjects internalized, or converted to "the world view of Alcoholics Anonymous." The self-savers and AA seemed to be perceived more favourably by family members and/or friends than the religious cult in Lofland. Positive attitudes were identified among family members or friends of new self-savers or AA members towards the self-savers

and AA organizations. Positive attitudes facilitated identity transformation. After all, these pre-converts were about to leave destructive relationships and behaviours behind. Family and other acquaintances could, potentially, exert a strong, positive influence on the eventual conversion, by encouraging the pre-convert to continue involvement with the group or organization.

Certain similarities and differences between Lifers and the pre-converts in Chang (1989), Greil and Rudy (1983), and Lofland (1977) can be identified. In contrast to pre-converts in existing research, Lifers are physically removed from their families, communities, and other social circles. Other pre-converts (Chang 1989; Greil and Rudy 1983) were free to choose to interact with family members. In comparison, Lifers can be geographically distanced from family members. In some cases, they have weak ties to family members. Further, they tend to restrict communication about the prison environment during visits. Given these circumstances, family members would have little influence in preventing or blocking conversion.

Lifers' family members can also act as catalysts to the conversion by instructing them on how to get along in prison, or engaging in illegal behaviour such as transporting contraband. This chapter focuses on the influence of family members and/or friends of Lifers on conversion.

Frequently, persevering visitors are immediate family members. These visitors include spouses, one or both parents, children, brothers and sisters. In some cases, grandparents,

aunts and uncles were mentioned. Visits or contact with friends from the outside, are virtually non-existent. Some Lifers experienced total loss of contact with family members during the course of their confinement. Their family members rarely had the financial resources to continue visits, if they were not resident in Kingston. Further, Lifers could be transferred from federal institutions in other provinces,[14] leaving family members behind. All but a few Lifers in this study had some contact with one or more family members throughout their life sentence. Contact with spouses, however, seemed to fluctuate and even diminish.

Only five of the Lifers interviewed were not involved in an intimate relationship at the time of their confinement. Among those who were involved in an intimate relationship, in all but a few cases, these relationships ended within six years of the sentence. Only one relationship survived 23 years of incarceration, with two break-ups during this time period. Six others continued the intimate relationships they had prior to the life sentence. However, these six Lifers have only been incarcerated between three and five years. Relationships often ended as a result of the incarceration, because;

1. one or both parties agreed to end the relationship at conviction or sentencing. Lifers ended intimate relationships primarily because of the length of the sentence and to avoid

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[14]Male Lifers who had been transferred from other Provinces, claimed the reason for such transfers, was primarily due to security risks they posed. For women, transfer to Kingston was necessary, because the only federal penitentiary for women is in Kingston.

worrying about infidelity.

2. the non-imprisoned spouse began another relationship;

3. the non-imprisoned spouse could not manage long distance travel or the financial burden of travelling to Kingston;

4. visiting hours established by the institution would conflict with the spouses' work or family obligations.

Of the Lifers who participated in this research, 16 have contact with a spouse they were involved with prior to prison. Many Lifers sought and established new relationships during the incarceration. These new relationships could be pursued by various methods, including,

1. being introduced to someone, by one of their (prison) friends or acquaintances. In a few instances, Lifers noticed women visiting other Lifers in the visiting room and asked to be introduced.

2. volunteers from the community attend Lifers group meetings. In some cases, Lifers began more frequent communication with a volunteer and developed a relationship.

3. some Lifers attend substance abuse programs or religious organizations when they are out on passes. In some cases, they became involved in a relationship with someone they met at one of these meetings;

4. one Lifer became acquainted with and married a woman he met through an advertisement he placed in the personal section of a newspaper;

Contact with parents, children, and siblings is more likely to survive the incarceration than intimate relationships. Several Lifers reported continual contact with at least one family member over the period of their incarceration. Frequency of in-person visits with them range from weekly, monthly, and even yearly. Communication by letter is more frequent. Writing and receiving letters helps to fill time and is, for some Lifers, a pleasant

form of communication. Phone calls, on the other hand, depend on availability of pay phones and the Lifer's ability to place collect calls. Lifers report that frequency of in-person visits, with spouses and family members, is influenced by:

1. ability of ageing parents to travel;

2. travelling distance to Kingston;

3. ability to meet financial requirements to travel to Kingston;

4. restrictions imposed by the institution:

(a) visiting hours are restricted to 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. weekdays and weekends. No visiting privileges are available during the evening;

(b) trailer visits are available for 72 hour intervals but only in three to four month intervals;

(c) escorted temporary absences are granted after an average of seven years of incarceration or until they reach minimum security, every three to four months for three to six hours at one time;

Notwithstanding administrative and other restrictions imposed on visits, Lifers welcome contact from outside family members. Often, they reported welcoming visits to help sustain close relationships, break the boredom of doing time, and to keep them in touch with the street. Imparting information about the prison experience to their relatives, however, is not part of a Lifer's agenda for visits. In fact, responses to questions about communication with family members, reveal that no discussion about the prison environment takes place between Lifers and their relatives, except for minor complaints about the administration. Reasons range from self-protection to other protection.

For some Lifers concern about worrying their families was

the reason for restricting discussion about prison. One Lifer commented,

> ***I wouldn't write to my mother and tell her someone inside got killed. That would just worry her. I tell them about basic things, like what I did today. I stay away from telling them something that would worry them.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Others restricted their conversations with relatives because of their cynical attitude toward prison administration.

> ***You don't tell anyone about prison. The prison phone is bugged and it's not private.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Because of this perception of being monitored, another Lifer was sensitive to the content of his telephone conversations. He commented,

> ***If I phone home and talk about it (prison), it's really only about the administration.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He would only discuss problems and frustrations he was experiencing with administration. Such problems included not getting speedy medical attention and prescriptions or being turned down for passes. He continued,

> ***You can get in trouble talking on the phone about something. Sometimes they (the administration) don't understand what I'm trying to do--like prevent a problem.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Keeping extra-prison family and/or friends who telephoned or visited at a distance, protected them from suspicion by guards that they could be "planning a scam." A "scam" could be an escape attempt or drug transaction, for example.

Other Lifers would not allow their "outside" acquaintances into their "inside" world. One Lifer would not discuss the prison

experience with his family because,

> ***They can't understand it. They have to be here to understand it. You have to experience the inside. There's no way I can tell you what it's like--really.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He continued, and explained that there were some things he would tell his wife. "Things that are mine, I'll tell her," he said. "Things" that are his, include his mood, problems with the administration, or being turned down for a job he applied for in prison. He would not discuss anything with her about the prison subculture, the conflict, or violence that take place inside. Apparently, the subculture and the violence are not his "things."

Another Lifer took the same approach. He commented about his conversations with his wife.

> ***She's always asking questions. There are some things I can't tell her because she's not a con. Like this guy got a beating up because he brought dope inside. Things like that. She's not a con so I don't tell her things like that.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

This Lifer claimed ownership of an "inside" status that he would not allow the outside world to penetrate. His wife "was not a con" and therefore, she could not understand the dynamics of the inside world. Either directly or indirectly, Lifers conveyed to their families that they are part of a separate world. A world which their "outside" associates will never understand.

Family members who do not understand the nature of the prison environment are unlikely to circumvent conversion. Still, some Lifers feel that contact with family members helped them avoid being consumed by the prison environment. One Lifer

reported having a "good relationship" with his family before prison. When asked to comment about family visits, he said,

> ***It's easy to fall into the prison routine, with no family contact. The visits kept me going.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Lifers look forward to visits from outside friends or relatives because the visits provide brief interludes from the prison environment. Even though visits allow prisoners to maintain a role identity separate from the institution and criminal justice system (Callaghan 1985) they were hardly effective in helping this Lifer resist the prison routine. A routine which, according to him, demanded,

> ***You learn not to look in anyone's cells. You learn to look at your feet all the time and you do get into the odd fight. We got used to prison and prison life...The prison experience is that you don't trust anyone...You don't rat. You don't steal from other cons--case out another guy. If you do, you're a dead man. I've broken fingers for that...you gotta teach the guy that they just don't do these things.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Even with family visits and contact with other extra-institutional bonds, he learned the prison, convict, way of life.

In terms of Lofland (1977), interrupted communication and/or interaction with extra-institutional bonds, geographical separation, and withholding information about the prison environment allows conversion to manifest. This Lifer's dialogue reveals a strong familiarity with the prison subculture. Familiarity with the prison environment and commitment to the convict code alerts one to the likelihood of conversion to a convict identity.

Many Lifers maintained consistent, uninterrupted contact with outside family or friends, from the time they were incarcerated. By way of illustration, one Lifer reported consistent contact with his spouse, children, and grandchildren during nine years of incarceration on a Life-12 sentence. He has trailer visits and also visits his family at home on unescorted temporary absences, every three months.

Notwithstanding this contact, the extent to which this Lifer's family was able to neutralize the effects of the prison environment, is questionable. His comments about living in prison support this argument. He stated,

> ***You have an internal code which totally bombards those who have never done time before. You learn this whole new code geared only for internal use...It's not a spoken code or an unspoken code. Basically, you keep your eyes and ears open and your mouth shut. You learn not to get involved in other people's business. You learn to do your own time.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

"Doing your own time," and "keeping your eyes and ears open and your mouth shut," were offered as examples of the prison code. In comparison to Lifers who had little or no contact with family members during the incarceration, this Lifer's experience did not differ dramatically. Notwithstanding frequent communication and loyalty to his family, he adopted and lives by the rules of the convict world.

Lifers who have never been imprisoned before the life sentence, frequently reported more favourable circumstances in their family lives. They described their families, prior to prison, as very "close" and families have been "supportive"

throughout the prison sentence. These first-time federal prisoners maintain frequent contact with several family members, including parents, siblings, spouses, and children.

One Lifer claimed that the most devastating circumstance of confinement was separation from family members.

> ***Because of my family background, it was difficult to be thrown into this situation.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

This Lifer is from an upper-middle class social and economic background. Before prison, activities with family members included golf and sailing. An intact, close relationship with a spouse and children was reported. Contact with family, during the incarceration, is frequent and consistent. Loyalty to family members and a strong, communicative family background has helped to circumvent full conversion to a convict way of life. Like other Lifers, this Lifer was separated from family members and avoids telling them about the stresses of the environment. Also, clinging to pre-custodial identity as a parent, frequent reference to vocational and leisure activities, and social and family background gave the impression that the prison way of life has not replaced former identities. This is substantiated by a claim that,

> ***I've kept my dress and appearance up and never picked up habits or activities of others.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Ordinary "street" clothes replaced "prison greens." Family members plan visits to accommodate escorted temporary absences or ensure that someone visits on a weekly basis. On passes, pre-

custodial leisure activities such as golf, theatre and church are enjoyed with family members. Further, prison slang and profane language during the interview were non-existent. For example, prison was an "institution" rather than a "joint." Guards were guards, not "screws." Other prisoners were "people" or "troublemakers" as opposed to "cons," or "airheads."

The prison world is characterized by a unique vocabulary[15] and Lifers often incorporate this vocabulary into their speech. Use of prison vocabulary routinely, sensitized the researcher to the presence of prison identity. The fact that prison jargon was non-existent during this interview, suggests that full conversion has not taken place.

This Lifer's loyalty and frequent interaction with family members, then, would give the impression that full conversion has been circumvented. Notwithstanding closeness to family, however, and the support they offered during the incarceration, a hint to this Lifer's familiarity or commitment to prison life was given, when it was stated,

> ***You can't give the impression that you're better than the others. If you pass someone, you can't look at them or give them the impression you're looking at them, or they'll explode.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

"Keeping your head down," or "looking at your feet," to avoid eye contact with other prisoners, is often referred to by Lifers when discussing the prison "code." Regardless of the influence of family members, then, this Lifer still accepted and

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[15]See Glossary

is sensitive to the standards of the prison environment. Still,

> ***I don't believe these circumstances will affect me later on in life. I believe I'll never forget them, but I also believe I will be able to pick up where I left off when I get out.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

The support of friends and family during the incarceration, and the fact that they are anxiously awaiting this Lifer's return to society, are credited for cushioning the effects of living in prison.

Another Lifer, and first-time federal prisoner, acknowledged that visits with parents and children have been consistent during the ten years he has been incarcerated. His experience with the prison environment was referred to earlier. When speaking about the first few years of his sentence, he commented,

> ***For the first couple years I was in, I did get involved in prison politics.*** (Lifers, Canadian federal prison, August, 1992)

This Lifer was confined to a special handling unit for three years as a result of being charged with a serious violent offence. After ten years in prison, and claiming at one point to begin "changing his ways," he maintains,

> ***I still have a tendency to gear my activities around the politics of the system. I won't hesitate to chop someone if I had to...I will defend myself against anyone at any cost...You know there's shit going on. If anyone tries to drag me down, I'll boot them one.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Despite close contact with his family, then, his comments and the events which transpired during his sentence suggest that contact with his family was not an effective or sufficient barrier to becoming absorbed in the prison subculture.

This is true for other Lifers. Another Lifer with a close family life before prison still enjoys an ongoing relationship with his parents and daughter. Regardless of their dependability and closeness, his family had little influence on his adaptation to the prison world. This man was well informed of the dynamics of the prison code.

> ***You have to learn to shut up and shut off emotions. Emotions aren't acceptable. You have to react to certain situations like someone dying in front of you. You look from side to side all the time, to make sure no one is creeping up on you...At the snap of your fingers, something could happen. You could be just walking down the hall on your way to dinner and all of a sudden somebody in front of you will keel over. Sixty people saw it, but nobody saw it. You just keep on walking. You don't even let on like you know what happened, because if you do, you could be the next one to go.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He, like other Lifers does not discuss incidents of interpersonal violence which take place in prison, with his parents. His objective is to avoid worrying them. Also, he does not discuss the rules of the prison environment and how prisoners must adapt and live by these rules in prison if they are to survive physically. As a result, his family is uninformed of any alterations, or changes taking place as a result of the prison lifestyle, and are not in a position to intercept a conversion process. To most Lifers, adaptation to the prison code means only a formula for survival, as opposed to conversion to an alternative lifestyle. As a result, their own perception of a need for intervention is non-existent.

Extra-institutional bonds can also act as catalysts to conversion. One example, is a family member, friend, or friends

instructing soon-to-be incarcerated Lifers on how to act in prison and what to expect. In all cases, unlike their relatives who were facing incarceration, these family members or friends had served federal time.

One young Lifer appreciated his father "giving me some pointers." He was instructed,

> ***To keep my nose clean, stay out of other people's business and I would get along fine.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

So far, he claims he has not had any problems. Perhaps visits with his father involve re-affirming his son's adherence to this code. Another Lifer, new to the federal system was instructed in a detention centre on prison protocol. He was told,

> ***One thing that some of the guys told me was that you don't call anyone a goof. You don't tell on anybody ...keep your mouth shut, mind your own business and no one would bother me.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He reported as well, that he has maintained correspondence with a friend who served twelve years of federal time. In his correspondence, he asks questions about how to get along in prison. Further comments he made verify the fact that he has taken seriously the advice he has been given. For instance, he said,

> ***Instead of encouraging people to talk and voice their own opinion, you basically have to keep your mouth shut...You can only be so nice...We've all got to survive...Most of the guys stay to themselves.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Other advice included,

> ***You have to be very cautious about who you associate with. If you don't know and you're not told what this***

> *other person is like, you stay away so you avoid trouble...it's very difficult to trust people. You seek out your own friends and that's who you associate with...you can basically stay out of fights just as long as you don't go looking for trouble.* (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

In this case, friends outside instructed Lifers on how to live in prison. Rather than instructing them to resist adaptation to the prison lifestyle, these extra-prison associates encouraged Lifers to learn and live by the rules of the prison environment.

Callaghan (1985) also found that visitors themselves often become institutionalized in the same fashion as a prisoner. Visitors, having to undergo the same mortification process as prisoners, are inducted into the prison world. Before entering the institution or visiting room for example, visitors are subject to searches of automobiles, handbags, etc., for illegal substances such as drugs, alcohol and weapons. Visitors are prohibited from transporting articles into the visiting room, must undergo criminal record searches and be listed on the prisoner's visitor information card before regular visits can begin. The assumption of criminality on the part of the visitor exists. Family members become part of the prison world through these administrative procedures.

Callaghan (1985) also found that prisoners frequently negotiate with visitors to transport contraband. They engage in a series of manipulative strategies in order to convince someone to smuggle contraband. Once the visitor consents to transporting contraband, their initiation into the prison is compounded. Lifers never admitted to this type of interaction going on

between them and their visitors, perhaps because of the repercussions associated with transporting contraband. Visitors induction into the prison environment through administrative procedures and engaging in illegal behaviour by transporting contraband, can facilitate rather than circumvent conversion.

Contact with extra-prison family and friends appeared then, to impose little influence on the Lifer's eventual subscription into the prison subculture. In reading Chang (1980), Greil and Rudy (1993) and Lofland (1977), extra-institutional bonds would have to develop an understanding about the cult or organization to which their relative sought membership in order to communicate their dissent or acceptance. This understanding would have to be conveyed by the pre-convert to their friends and families.

With the lack of communication between Lifers and their families about the prison environment, it is doubtful that families would come to understand the dynamics of the prison environment. Without this understanding, influencing or circumventing the conversion would be difficult, if not impossible. Perhaps visiting relatives notice a changes in their incarcerated relatives, but perhaps too late to make a difference. Further, the potential for family members to facilitate conversion has been demonstrated.

Regardless of visits, Lifers still adapted to the prison world, evidenced by their commitment to the subcultural code. Any encouragement by outside bonds to resist adherence to the prison code which represents not only an alternative lifestyle, but

physical survival, would be detrimental.

In several cases, Lifers resisted involvement in violence in prison, but subscribed to the rules without question. Avoiding this violence, however, is more a function of the nature of the life sentence, than the influence of their families. Lifers consistently reported avoiding trouble and violence because their eventual release was contingent upon their prison behaviour, not because of the influence of their families.

Lifers are exposed to the prison environment for longer periods of time than they can spend with their families. Also, Lifers are exposed to prolonged interaction with other prisoners allowing the conversion process to continue and manifest. The final stage of Lofland's model of identity transformation focuses on such prolonged, or intensive interaction. The nature of interaction among Lifers, in the prison environment, is the basis of the following discussion.

## CHAPTER 10

### Intensive Interaction

> ***People leave you alone at Millhaven. You can do your own time. You can spend time in your cell or you can go out, whatever you want. But most of the time, people just keep to themselves.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1993)

Symbolic Interactionists assert that identity is defined, maintained, modified and reshaped in the presence of referent others. When individuals confront each other in interaction, meaning is assigned to certain experiences, and they engage in bargaining, negotiating, and agreements. Eventually individuals in interaction will negotiate an identity. Lofland argued that individuals must engage in prolonged, intensive interaction in order to achieve a negotiated identity. Divine Precept pre-converts were continually in the physical presence of converts.

Similarly, the "self-savers" in Chang (1989) had continuous interaction with staff and other residents through counselling sessions and living arrangements. In Greil and Rudy (1983), new AA members were encouraged to attend as many meetings as possible, and to socialize before and after meetings with other members.

The data presented suggest that Lifers do engage in intense interaction with other Lifers, which interaction is necessary to achieve full conversion. Lifers interact with other Lifers, although they claim to keep to themselves, and limit their interaction. Lifers develop friendships with other prisoners, and learn prison subcultural rules through direct and/or non-verbal

interaction. The purpose of this chapter is to examine interaction and the reasons Lifers give for keeping to themselves. Further, episodes of "negotiating" and "bargaining," which appear in the data are discussed.

To begin, one Lifer's comment illustrates the physical proximity of Lifers, and other prisoners, to each other. He noted,

> ***Living in the institution is just like living as a couple. You face each other internally, or they're beside you or above you.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Regardless of this physical proximity, which facilitates interaction, Lifers report that they keep to themselves and deliberately avoid interaction with other prisoners, especially when they are first incarcerated. When Lifers do begin interacting, they do so very carefully. This is consistent with Flanagan (1981), who found that Lifers tend to choose associates wisely. In fact, many Lifers acknowledged being loners and admitted their tendency to isolate themselves. One Lifer confirmed this,

> ***Probably the reason that you do stay to yourself is to see and learn what to do and what not to do and who is who.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Even when isolating, by observing actions of others, Lifers learn prison protocol. Eventually, out of necessity, Lifers begin to interact with others.

> ***It's basically out of necessity that you talk and converse. The conversations are meaningless. You can't open up to anybody. Everybody basically pulls back. They don't want to tell anyone their problems. I don't want to tell my problems to anyone.*** (Lifer, Canadian

federal prison, August 1992)

Interaction with other prisoners often begins when loneliness becomes overwhelming. Still, communication is often unsatisfying, as noted by this Lifer. Others stated, "I don't talk about anything. I'm isolated," or "I don't associate with very many." These Lifers had not served any time prior to the life sentence. Those with previous prison experience made comparable comments, that Lifers keep to themselves except for a few friendships.

To another Lifer, isolation is a means to combat,

> ***Fear of not being accepted [by other prisoners]...fear of looking stupid. You have to be very aware of how you are portraying yourself and how others perceive you.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Fear of being victimized, is also a reason for limiting interaction with others. Until this Lifer was convinced that he was accepted by other prisoners, he kept to himself and would not allow other prisoners into his space. "That's the way you survive in here," he said. "Everyone does it." Minding the basic premises of the prison code helped him achieve this acceptance.

Lifers isolate themselves from others to hide their identities and personalities in order to provide emotional safety. As one Lifer expressed it,

> ***No one is prepared to show any emotions in here, because it's a sign of weakness. If you show that, they've [other prisoners] got you. They'll take advantage. If they do find out you're a pushover or show a sign of weakness, they'll go out of their way to try and get you to react to something--to get a reaction from you.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

In most situations, isolation would be interpreted as a barrier to internalization of alternative identities. However, in prisons, isolation, and minding another person's space, are part of the subculture. Managing actions to avoid showing weakness, emotion, or "looking stupid" is an acceptance of the prison subculture.

Other reasons given for Lifers' practice of keeping to themselves involve avoiding the "bullshit and getting hurt," and "difficulty trusting other inmates." Isolation permitted Lifers to avoid individuals "you just don't want to associate with," primarily sex offenders. Association with sex offenders, "stool pigeons" and "rape hounds" is unacceptable. As a result, Lifers are cautious of their interaction with other prisoners.

Perception of themselves as "different" from the general prison population represents still another reason for Lifers isolating themselves. It is interesting to note the comments of one Lifer who claimed he kept to himself,

> ***Because it's not like you got a bunch of criminals in here--in jail. Now they're mostly people with problems with drugs and alcohol. Most people don't understand me in here. Their attitude is different from mine. I feel today, exactly the same as I did when I was outside. I still detest it. I still feel as up-tight as day one. Every day is an ordeal for me.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Some Lifer's fit the profile of Irwin's (1987) "thief." They were raised in families of "armed robbers," and grew up with a "group of guys" who are, for all intents and purposes, a gang of career criminals. As bank robbers, they might "never take a pinch" on things they planned and made money on. Some accumulated

a lengthy criminal record for armed bank robberies, escape attempts, kidnapping, and forceful detainment charges, both before and after incarceration. This profile and criminal history, in their opinion separates them from other criminal profiles in the prison population.

To Irwin (1987,8), the "thief" knows how to avoid trouble and stays away from "stool pigeons," "square johns," and other disreputable prisoners such as sex offenders. When "thieves" form friendships in prison it is usually with other "thieves" they meet in prison, or, were allied with before prison. In fact, the Lifer quoted above, reported avoiding friendships in prison almost entirely. With the exception of one prison friend, his only other companionship, or contact with a friend is with his wife who visits him twice daily.

The profile of the prison population in which this Lifer lives, is consistent with the profile of prisoners, Irwin (1987) claims that "thieves" avoid. Repeated escape attempts resulted in his confinement in a special handling and protective custody institution, where the prison population is primarily comprised of "square johns," "stool pigeons," and "drag queens." Accordingly, this Lifer was opposed to interacting with these prisoners and voluntarily isolated himself from them.

Other Lifers limited their interaction with other prisoners by resisting involvement in the prison subculture. That is, the subculture of violence. One Lifer, who had served a short provincial sentence before the Life sentence commented,

> ***I didn't get into the subculture right from the beginning. I didn't do it on the street and I'm not about to start in prison...I wanted to be my own person. I did a lot of cell time...They [Lifers] keep to themselves to avoid the subculture.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

As stated earlier, by avoiding the prison subculture of violence, Lifers perceived themselves as separate from the convict world. The tendency to avoid the subculture of violence and perceive themselves as "different from the rest" is especially common among first-time federal prisoners. They convey a message to other prisoners, as well as prison administration, that they reject certain elements of the prison environment. They are however, only successful in resisting the subculture of violence. Their dialogue reveals repeatedly, that regardless of the degree of isolation, they internalize a "code of behaviour" geared to life in prison.

Another Lifer offered a similar explanation for limited interaction in prison,

> ***They keep to themselves to avoid the subculture and the games.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1993)

To this Lifer, isolation is also a means of physical protection from life threatening circumstances or incidents in the prison environment. By isolating, he said,

> ***That's the way you survive in here. Everyone does it. These places are run on fear.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Becoming friends with someone, and feeling obliged to assist in a fight, has dangerous implications for physical safety. If Lifers become involved, they fear being the next victim of

assault. Hence, there is a tendency to limit interaction which might result in developing friendships. Avoiding the interaction with other prisoners, for physical safety, is important to Lifers. One Lifer who lived a criminal lifestyle on the outside, segregated himself from interaction with other prisoners, as a safety mechanism. He commented,

> ***You basically have to function on your own...I've seen about twenty guys get killed. It tears you apart. It's easier to keep your distance so if someone gets killed, you don't have to help them out. A few times that I did try to help someone out, I ended up almost getting killed myself.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

In prison then, staying alone means staying alive. Voluntary isolation from other prisoners, prevents Lifers from interacting. The segregation, rather than a barrier to conversion, acts as a catalyst, since it is a recognized part of the prison subculture. It seems, also, seeing "guys get killed" is a normal part of the prison subculture. Something this Lifer, and perhaps others, respond to with indifference.

Lofland might argue that the interaction which takes place among Lifers is not sufficient to produce full conversion. To Lofland (1977) closeness was crucial to conversion. Pre-converts were in close and continuous access to converts. During intensive interaction with converts, pre-converts learned what the Divine Precept world was about. Eventually, a new identity was built. In Chang (1989) and Greil and Rudy (1983), organizational activities and commitment to the goals of the organization, enabled pre-converts to interact frequently, and intensively with converts

and achieve total conversion.

In comparison to the pre-converts in Chang (1989), Greil and Rudy (1983) and Lofland (1977), Lifers are in close, continuous proximity to each other. Still, isolation, as a means of personal and emotional safety differed from other convert groups. Further, among Lifers "frequent" interaction replaced intensity, or "closeness" demonstrated in other convert groups. Finally, interpersonal communication is broader among Lifers than the verbal communication described by Chang (1989), Greil and Rudy (1983), and Lofland (1977). Observation or non-verbal communication replaced verbal communication as a catalyst for conversion.

One Lifer describes the process of learning the "prison code."

> ***You see it more than you hear it. If anyone asks you if you've seen anything happen, whether or not you did see something, you don't admit it.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He went on to say, that he knew of another prisoner who witnessed a stabbing and in subsequent interaction overheard that prisoner denying knowledge of the incident. "That was the code being relayed in unspoken language," he said. He acknowledged that most of the information about the prison environment was relayed to him through actions and not words.

Observation is more accessible, and perhaps more important, than face-to-face communication in prison socialization. One first time federal prisoner, and Lifer, remarked,

***You know there's a protocol but you don't know what is***

> ***right and what is wrong. You don't know who to ask. You don't know who to approach. Finally you get the nerve to ask someone or you do whatever people are doing. I try to stay pretty much to myself and observe. I'm a good listener and I pick up things by watching and seeing what others do.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August, 1992)

Another Lifer commented,

> ***You learned not to look in anyone's cells. You learned to look at your feet all the time and you do get into the odd fight. We got used to prison and prison life. There was no real instruction on how to act. You just pick it up watching other people.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

The widespread practice of observational learning and limited access to information does not mean that Lifers do not communicate the culture in verbal interaction. Lifers said, "People in here fill you in about what people are like" and tell you that to survive you must "mind your own business, respect other prisoners' space, never look in another con's cell and never call anyone a "goof."

These rules comprise segments of the prison "code." This prison code is generally accepted rather than negotiated, opposed, or disputed. Few episodes of negotiated identity during interaction appeared in the data. In fact, Lifers reported being able to "weave their own tracks" in prison, and experience little or no pressure to conform to expectations or demands of others. The only recognizable form of negotiated identity occurs when Lifers are forced to take a stand against an aggressor. Sometimes, when they are approached by an adversary Lifers are forced to defend "who they are" and "who they want to be" in the prison world.

When he first arrived in prison, one Lifer commented,

> ***The cool guys and the tough guys tried to offer me things--to be my friend. They see I'm not interested in becoming any part of a clique...so they just leave me alone.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He was being offered contraband--drugs and alcohol--and forced to take a stand. Apparently, the harassment ended when he insisted he was not interested. He claimed that his orientation towards "model prisoner" status, as a means to achieving timely release from prison, helped him to avoid these demands and becoming involved with a problem population.

Another Lifer was forced to defend himself against an aggressor during his initial period of incarceration. In his opinion, standing up to an aggressor is necessary as a future means of protection in the prison environment. During a lockdown he was in the laundry room and approached by another prisoner. He describes the event,

> ***When he came in and approached me aggressively like that, I didn't let him know I was scared. If I did--if I had just backed away he would have become very pushy. When you're new in the joint, everybody tests you to find out what you're like.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prisoner, August 1992)

By standing up to an aggressor Lifers convey a message that they will not be intimidated. This offsets future altercations. Standing up to an aggressor forms part of the prison subcultural code. By resisting the demands of an adversary Lifers are deemed to have accepted the standards imposed by the prison environment.

In a few instances, "Lifer" status was used as a means of intimidating potential aggressors. One commented,

> ***When you first come in, they will try to win you over. But once you get respect, the respect of people and get the time in and because I'm a Lifer they know you won't back down. If you back down, they run right over you.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Another remarked,

> ***Lifers in general have a problem with people who are doing short time. People that are doing short time, we make it very clear to them that they're to leave us alone, that we have nothing to lose if we have to settle a score. We would end it now.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Realistically, Lifers do have a lot to lose if they "settle a score."[16] Lifers do not have a warrant expiry date and their parole is contingent upon their prison behaviour. While they are sensitive to threats upon their reputation and conscious of protecting their chances for timely release, they can convince other prisoners, because of the nature of their [violent] crime, that they "will not back down." As such, they negotiate an identity with other prisoners.

Negotiation of identity through "altercasting" is not prevalent in the data. Altercasting involves casting people into roles which contradict those they hold of themselves. Eventually, they begin to think of themselves in that role and behave accordingly. Still, Lifers can be altercast as "killers," and someone to be feared, by other prisoners. One Lifer himself confirmed,

> ***We [Lifers] are the killers. There's a certain sense of fear amongst the short term guys towards the Lifers.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

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[16]"Settling a score" to prisoners, means resolving conflict with violence, regardless of the outcome.

Lifers will capitalize on the fear other prisoners attribute to them, because they have killed someone. They will "pull up" [confront] short-timers who jeopardize programs or activities Lifers have initiated in prison because "they [Lifers] have to be there [prison] for a long time." Further, Lifers assure adversaries they "won't back down" and they "have nothing to lose" if they have to "settle a score." "You don't want trouble with me," were the words of another Lifer when confronted by an adversary in prison. Lifers do not typically identify themselves as "killers" or "someone to be feared." The fear associated to them by other prisoners however appears to influence their actions.

Consistent with the literature on long-term incarceration Lifers share information amongst themselves. Although they limit interaction with others for various reasons, through direct or non-verbal communication, information is exchanged about the prison environment and prescriptions concerning behaviour. Their actions are continually governed by a set of norms geared to living in prison. Eventually, they adopt a manner of living which helps them survive.

Regardless of their adaptation to the prison world through verbal and non-verbal communication, Lifers continue to reject involvement in the prison subculture and "convict" status. Avoiding violence and use of contraband is enough to accomplish disassociation from the convict world. Identity is rarely negotiated or defended and incidents of altercasting are non-

existent. This is perhaps because of the identity which is attached to the violence that brought them to prison.

Notwithstanding their claim to immunity from the dynamics of the prison world, some Lifers believe that lengthy incarceration has changed or affected them in some way. Some believe their pre-prison identity has been lost or altered. Others believe that "convict" identity has been added to their stock of pre-custodial identities and will leave them once they leave prison. Finally, when Lifers share their experience with their first escorted temporary absence, they express a perceived difference between themselves and the outside world. These perceived changes and/or differences form the basis of the final chapter.

# CHAPTER 11

## The Legacy

> ***The longer you're in, the farther away the street gets. When you're first in jail, you only think about the street.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Previous research has suggested that long-term incarceration imposes adverse effects on individuals, making eventual reintegration difficult, if not impossible (Sykes and Messinger 1960). Thomas, Peterson, and Cage (1981), in their study of long term incarceration, argued that integration into an inmate contraculture encouraged adoption of a variety of attitudes, values and self-conceptions.

According to Thomas, Peterson, and Cage criminal self-identification resulted from integration into this culture. Some Lifers believe that they have changed, or have been affected by the prison environment. Others feel that they will be able to carry on where they left off, once they are paroled, and leave the prison world behind. The purpose of this chapter is to examine personal changes and/or differences Lifers believe have occurred, as a result of lengthy incarceration.

The experience of some Lifers support the findings of Murphy, Waldorf, and Reinarman (1990). In a study of cocaine sellers developing "drug dealer" identities, these authors found that dealer identity tended not to replace former legitimate identities, but "were added to a person's stock of conventional identities." Some Lifers frequently reported importing and holding onto pre-custodial identities throughout the

incarceration.

One Lifer reported a "prisoner" identity fastening itself to pre-custodial identities. He had served 15 years on a Life-25 sentence at the time of the interview. He said,

> ***I came to see myself as a prisoner but that didn't make me feel less of a son to my mother. That is the way I identify myself and how I was perceived. I see myself now as a student, not more than I see myself as a prisoner. I am now a husband and its hard to tell when all the changes start to take place.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Some Lifers believe the prison environment has not changed them. For example, one Lifer, only seven years into his life sentence, and a first-time federal prisoner, recalled his mother's comments. He said,

> ***She says prison has marked me...I had to adapt to it [prison], but it hasn't changed the person that I am. It does affect you and it does leave you marked. Whether you can see it or not. I will have to leave a lot of things that I learned here behind. There's things that I've had to do inside that I won't have to do on the street. You can't have an attitude about mistrusting people--that they're always looking at you. Always watching your back, feeling crowded or feeling people are invading your space. This isn't an invasion on the outside, but it is on the inside.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

This Lifer understood that the prison environment had made an impact on him. Still, he insisted that he held onto pre-custodial perceptions of himself as a father and a son and that certain prison actions and behaviours would have to be abandoned on the street.

Others felt their identity was surrendered the moment they entered the prison world and are bitter about the effect the prison experience has had on them. For example, one Lifer who had

only served 18 months on a provincial sentence, before the Life sentence felt,

> ***You lose everything. It doesn't matter who you were or what you were, or what you were doing out there, you just lose everything. You're nobody in here. You lose all your rights. You're told when you can eat. When you can go to sleep. You have to earn your identity back and it can be a struggle to maintain your identity.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Finally, there are those Lifers who perceived a "transitory" as opposed to "maintained" identity. The words of one Lifer are very descriptive. He commented,

> ***I'm a Lifer here. On the street I'm not going to say I'm a Lifer. That's something that has been put on me the day I was sentenced. I felt like a Lifer since the day I was sentenced.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He believes he will leave the "Lifer" identity behind him once he leaves prison. During the interview, however, he boasted his "model prisoner" status. "I keep my nose clean. I say hello to the right people [administration] and eventually you get recognized," he stated. With the exception of co-operation with administration he demonstrated compliance with the prison code which might leave prison with him.

Flanagan (1981) was concerned, and found that long-term inmates lost their ability to consider life on the outside. This seems to be the case with the Lifer quoted at the beginning of this chapter, who went on to say,

> ***It's hard for me to remember the street after the first five years. The street was always on my mind during that first five years. After that five years you're in limbo for another five to six years. You go through the paces and days. At some point you realize you have a release date or parole date and you let go of the***

***street and survive from day to day.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

This man has been in prison for fifteen years. He is confined to a medium security institution and has never been out on an escorted temporary absence. His only contact with the outside world during that 15 years involved a transfer from one institution to another. While he is unfamiliar with the outside world because of his custody, he has still not lost hope for his release.

> ***The minute I get out I want to work as many hours as I can. The only help I am going to need is re-adjustment. Someone to show me things that have changed.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He did not clarify what he thought his "re-adjustment" needs would entail. However, he acknowledged that he had never seen an instant teller machine or a cellular phone. He inquired about what it was like to drive on a highway now, as opposed to 15 years ago. Apparently, having someone familiarize him with "things that have changed" would meet his "re-adjustment" needs. Considering these factors, and the present shortage of employment opportunities, his re-adjustment might be more difficult than he anticipates.

Another Lifer, even after ten years in prison, anticipated smooth re-adjustment to society upon release. He said,

> ***I just need to get used to being outside and working outside. It's the little things I'm going to need help with...As long as I get working and I'll need a car, insurance, an apartment--it should take me about six months to get back on my feet.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He was not clear what "the little things" are that he is

going to need help with. He is convinced however, that having a job will guarantee his post-release success. Again, the difficulty obtaining employment is overlooked. Furthe[redacted], his anticipation of a smooth reintegration and "getting back on his feet" in six months, after serving a long prison sentence, is unrealistic.

To these two Lifers, the potential impact of lengthy incarceration will not interfere with reintegration. Most Lifers view employment as their primary consideration for release and successful reintegration. Some are more realistic than others about employment opportunities. Several Lifers are satisfied to work in unskilled labour jobs immediately on release, working towards self- or semi-skilled employment. Others want to use the knowledge they have acquired by living in prison in post-release self-employment. They see themselves as future counsellors for substance abuse problems, or they vow to prevent a future generation of federal prisoners by working with young offenders so "they don't have to come into one of these places."

Lifers live in a world of "shrunken" perceptions about the outside world. When asked to comment about their plans for release, they are frequently pre-occupied with where they will live and work. Balancing a budget, managing an apartment, learning to interact with their families, co-workers and other people on the street, how to resolve a dispute, or avoid "settling a score," with a boss, co-worker, spouse, or child, are marginal concerns.

Other researchers (MacKenzie and Goodstein 1985; Porporino and Zamble 1984; Thomas 1977; Wormith 1984; and Zubrycki 1984) have recognized allegations by various researchers that long-term incarceration imposes debilitating effects on individuals. They are not, however, convinced by the findings. During the interviews Lifers were asked to comment on how they felt the prison environment has changed or affected them. One Lifer, after 12 years of incarceration stated,

> ***You don't get normal conversation. When you talk about people inside, it's a con talk. When you separate or start to speak with people outside, you speak in the same way. I understand I need to re-arrange my speech and bring it back to street language. It's going to take a long time.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He was prompted to expand on his argument about "re-arranging" his speech for the outside. He continued,

> ***Our conversation in the inside community and mannerisms has changed and it has to change for the outside. We're constantly looking around. We have to keep aware of the proximity of people around us. We have to be conscious of whose around us...We need to learn to relax in the community. You can always tell someone when they're out in the community. You do things cafeteria ways. Like picking up utensils in one hand and your tray in another. You can spot someone whose been inside by the way they line up and hoard into a building. We need to learn to re-enter and re-arrange.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He felt these mannerisms, which he claimed to have acquired in prison, would identify him as a convict on the outside. To him, these mannerisms have become part of his everyday life in prison, but are incompatible and will have to change for the outside world. He concluded,

> ***What is instilled with the con is everyone he sees***

> ***looks at him and he thinks he is being looked at as a con. What they [cons] think, doesn't really exist. It's a problem of the internal environment. By being inside, what you do and say is who you are. On the street, what you do and say is also who you are.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

To this Lifer, there are two kinds of people. Those who have been "inside" and those who have not. Each type, he contends, can spot the other type. He also recognizes that accepting the "convict" identity, is necessary in prison but not acceptable for the outside world.

Several Lifers related perceived changes in themselves to their experience with escorted temporary absences (ETAs). Escorted temporary absences are often referred to by Lifers as "resocialization" passes. Passes are used by prison administration to assist long-term prisoners in maintaining contact or re-acquainting themselves with a community. Passes represent part of a gradual release system which enable Lifers to re-enter society with some appreciation of what to expect. The extent to which ETAs and UTAs enable Lifers to cast off, or at least neutralize, a "convict" identity is questionable, due to certain circumstances. For example,

1. Passes frequently started once the Lifer has served at least one-third of their sentence. This would result in those serving Life-25, being confined and exposed to the prison environment for at least 8 years, before their first pass;

2. Passes are subject to "arbitrary" decisions of the administration. That is,
   (a) passes could be cancelled without notice; and
   (b) pass privileges could be suspended as a punishment for institutional infraction;

3. Lifers are always escorted by one, and sometimes two guards. Even though escorts always dress in street clothes when they

accompany a Lifer on a pass, Lifers often reported feeling conspicuous;

4. Passes are granted for 4-6 hours every three months, when Lifers began their temporary absence program. Thereafter, they averaged 4-6 hour passes monthly. The time spent "resocializing" in the community is insignificant in comparison to the time spent in prison.

Escorted absences are often something to look forward to by Lifers. They are able to segment their sentence and this is evidenced by frequently commenting, "now I could see the end of the tunnel" or "it was the beginning of my freedom." Often a sense of bitterness was expressed by Lifers who had been denied passes because of a "perceived" risk due to an escape attempt or a prison infraction.

One Lifer, when asked to comment about personal changes the prison world has brought about described his first escorted temporary absence after seven years in prison.

> ***While I was out, I looked like I was well socialized. The guard I was with thought I would be a basket case--very nervous--on the first pass. I went to a shopping centre. I thought that everyone was staring at me, saying there's one of those dirty convicts. I realized it was me staring at me. I would go in to buy tapes and I would keep a $50.00 bill visible, to prove I wasn't stealing.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

The self-consciousness during his interaction on the outside is evident and, according to him, differs from his experience with being at large in a community before prison. Returning to prison was difficult. He continued,

> ***You're out there mixing with other people. It's nice. And now you have to come back and sit in jail. This is tough. It takes a lot of willpower to come back. After I returned from one ETA, the guard that escorted me back to my cell looked at me and said 'You don't look like a criminal at all.' He was watching me and I told***

*him I'm not. I was, but I'm ready to be out now.* (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1993)

He reported that the discomfort and self-consciousness subsided on subsequent passes. In fact, several Lifers reported a sense of diminishing anxiety as they ventured out on subsequent passes.

Another Lifer who served seven years before his first escorted temporary absence discussed his experience.

> ***You lose a lot of perception about how far away things are. If you saw a car coming, you don't know how long it will take to get to where you are.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

This loss of depth perception, was, according to him a change brought about by the prison experience. He claimed however, that on subsequent ETAs his sense of distance did improve and his intimidation with the outside world lessened.

A sense of fear and anxiety was not an issue for one other Lifer who described his experience with his first ETA after eight years. He remarked,

> ***The only thing I did was take a car ride to Toronto and back. When I came back, I felt like I was floating. It was like I had never been away [from society]. I had no problem. If we stopped at a rest area I had no problem going into the restaurant and ordering something, sitting there or moving about with people. It was like the long wait had ended and this long wait was waiting for passes. I thought, it won't be long until the next one. It felt like I was never out of society. It took all those [prison] years away and the clock started ticking again.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

The distance between Kingston and Toronto would easily consume the time allowed to Lifers on their first pass. Depending on the rigid adherence to the time frame by the escort, this

Lifer was hardly at large in the outside world long enough to feel uncomfortable. Except for his visit to a restaurant, he would have been confined to a car and a stretch of highway, under the supervision of a guard. This situation would hardly differ from a transfer between a Toronto detention centre and a Kingston penitentiary. Still, he was convinced that the prison experience had not changed him, or altered his ability to interact in the outside world.

Another Lifer now in his 17th year of a Life-10 sentence received his first pass after 16 years. Every Monday night he attends a substance abuse meeting. He leaves the medium security prison where he is incarcerated, with a guard, attends the meeting and returns to the prison. He believes,

> ***It's a chance for me to prove to the authorities that I'm parole material. I've been out on several passes without incident.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

To him, the prison world has not imposed "debilitating" effects which renders interaction in the community impossible. While he acknowledged that "it was a little scary going out after 16 years," he is comfortable now with attending these meetings and interacting with others. Still, he confines himself to one activity which prevents him from experiencing varied and other socialization activities in the community. The meetings are predictable, he sees primarily the same people every Monday night, and engages in the same activity. As a result, his experience of what life is like on the outside is limited.

"Re-orientation" and "resocialization" were not a problem

for one female Lifer who began her program of temporary absences after three years of incarceration. She is granted the usual six hour passes on a monthly basis. She spoke of her experience with ETAs without any expression of anxiety or apprehension exhibited by other Lifers. In the company of her escort, and sometimes family members, she golfs, shops, attends church, and live theatre. She expects to be able to "take up where she left off" once she is released from prison. In her opinion, the experience with prison has not changed her ability to interact in the community with family members and friends.

Another female Lifer, serving a Life-25 sentence, spoke fondly of her experiences with ETAs.

> ***TAs make me feel like I'm part of society. I won't need to get used to being on the outside or proving I'm not a threat to society, because I've been outside.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

This woman is serving Life-25 and has been in prison for 15 years. Her ETAs likely started in her 8th year. She goes out on passes with her daughters, in the company of an escort. She plays bingo, shops, and visits parks with her daughters. She, like other Lifers, confines herself to predictable, familiar activities. Although "being a part of society" is restricted to three major recreational activities, she perceives herself as a person capable of living outside prison walls.

Even Lifers who were incarcerated prior to the Life sentence speak of the apprehension associated with their first ETA. One Lifer, who served 18 months provincial time prior to the life sentence, remarked,

> ***You walk out holding your breath and there's a certain amount of proudness.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

His reaction was to "act normal" because "You don't act normal in prison." He continued,

> ***You watch your escort and you try to imitate their calmness. It's exciting. You know that once you hit your first ETA, at some point you will be free as long as you don't mess it up.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

His escort took him to a movie where "You're in a dark room and you feel so closed in." He acknowledged a certain sense of discomfort yet, he claimed the ETAs "were not too bad," because he had a "security blanket." That security blanket was his escort. When he began an unescorted temporary absence (UTA) program, he claimed he "never really thought about the emotional stuff" until a year later." The "emotional stuff" is the anxiety and fear often associated with re-acquaintance with the outside world. He continued,

> ***I was too proud, so proud and I wanted to be so normal. I never revealed my fears or my emotions. This was my chance to prove myself. No matter how much I was shaking I tried to put on airs. This was the beginning of my freedom. You want to make it, so you chuck all the fears away. Now [one year later] you realize how scary it was. Everyone just expects you to be so normal.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

Another Lifer had also served 18 months of provincial time before the Life sentence. He was incarcerated for 11 years before his first pass. On this pass, he was out for four hours and was escorted by two guards. He went to a restaurant with his mother and his sister.

> ***When I got back, I couldn't believe I'd been out. When***

> ***I was out there--so much--so many trucks, bikes, people--so much activity. I was taking everything in. I felt like everyone was looking at me. I felt like a fish out of water.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

On his next pass, he went out for lunch with a guard, to a mall. During the visit to the mall,

> ***I went over to watch something that was going on in the centre of the mall. Everyone was banging into me. That wasn't the way it was in jail. Everyone has a certain space and you don't really crowd anyone.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1993)

He was, therefore, conscious of the proximity of individuals to himself on this outing which is typical of the prison world. Subsequent passes seemed to be more enjoyable for him and he learned to be more relaxed in crowds. On his first 72 hour UTA he visited his parents in his home town. During this time, and at the age of 30, he obtained his beginners driving licence. "I would make an excuse to go somewhere, just so I could drive," he said.

As his temporary absences accumulated, he claimed to be able to separate himself from the "joint" when he is out. However,

> ***At certain times I feel like I'm a convict. I feel a difference between me and other people.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1992)

He recognizes a difference when he is out on passes socializing with his girlfriend and her friends.

> ***Everyone was socializing and I was on the same wavelength, but I still feel different. I have to become accustomed to a condensed version of society. If I walk into a restaurant and my girlfriend isn't with me, I feel lost. Its very intimidating. I'm just starting now to feel relaxed when I'm outside.*** (Lifer, Canadian federal prison, August 1991)

He did not explain what was different between himself and others. Even after one year of escorted and unescorted passes, and regardless of his claim to feeling more relaxed in the community, this Lifer still experiences some anxiety when interacting with people on the outside. In that respect he claims the prison experience has changed him.

Experience with resocialization passes suggests that the prison experience has made an impact upon Lifers. It is unusual for individuals to describe themselves as "floating" during a car ride between Kingston and Toronto and obtaining a driver's licence at the age of 30. Further, individuals in free society seldom "hold their breath" and feel "proud" about being at large in a community or worry about bumping into someone in a crowd.

For a long time, Lifers live by a set of anti-social rules. They have difficulty making friends in prison and they develop distorted interaction skills. Some recognize, on ETAs, they have been affected by these anti-social rules and interaction skills which are not meant for life outside prison. Moreover, they recognize changes in their interaction skills when they are in the community. Also, their own recognition that certain mannerisms are necessary in prison, but incompatible with the outside world, suggests that "convict" identity might be transitory as opposed to permanent.

## CHAPTER 12

### Summary

The purpose of this research was to examine the impact of the prison environment on Lifers' identity. Lifers are individuals serving life sentences in prison for first or second degree murder. They are, therefore, exposed to the prison environment for a lengthy, uninterrupted period of time. It was hypothesized that living in prison for a long period of time would have an effect on their identity.

Existing literature related to the effects of lengthy incarceration acknowledges that criminal or convict self-identification results after long prison sentences are served. However, explanation as to how criminal or convict identity emerges, is absent. Using a symbolic interaction perspective, and John Lofland's model of identity transformation as a guideline, an ethnographic method through formal interviews is utilized in this research. The objective was to provide a more detailed account of how convict identity is achieved during lengthy incarceration.

Stages of the Lofland model of identity conversion have been supported by the circumstances of Lifers. Lifers, especially those who have never served time, or only served provincial time before the life sentence, experience tension over the prospects of being incarcerated in the federal prison system. Tension is often described as fear in anticipating the incarceration, and uncertainty of what could happen in a volatile, unpredictable environment. The potential for sudden and unexpected altercations

with other prisoners, and not knowing how to respond to them, represent a source of tension to Lifers. Alternatively, Lifers who had served federal time, or were allied with a criminal or deviant lifestyle prior to the life sentence, do not report overwhelming tension. They know "how to do the time."

In an effort to mitigate, or solve problems with tension, Lifers learn the prison subcultural code. Learning rules and norms which prevail in prison often takes place at the beginning of the sentence. As time passes, tension subsides because the rules of the prison world guide interaction with other prisoners and provide a measure of personal safety. Admission into prison, a point when they learn the prison subculture rules is, therefore, recognized as a turning point.

Some Lifers made the transfer into prison with minimal tension. They had served time or, had been affiliated with a deviant subculture, such as organized motorcycle clubs, before the life sentence. Turning points for these Lifers were identified after abandoning lethargic or rebellious behaviour, when the significance of the life sentence is recognized. At this point, Lifers realize that their eventual release depends upon their prison record and involvement in prison academic, vocational, and rehabilitative programs. Notwithstanding a new orientation towards constructive activity, the prison subcultural code still governs their interaction with other prisoners.

Finally, a lost appeal represents a turning point in the Lifer's sentence. Lifers often enter prison with an appeal of the

sentence or conviction pending. Until the outcome of the appeal, Lifers concentrate on maintaining "model prisoner" status, which might aid a successful appeal. Once an appeal is lost, Lifers temporarily lose hope. This is a point when some Lifers reported lapsing into rebellious, non-productive behaviour. They can become involved in violence, drugs and alcohol in prison. Again, when they become conscious of the significance of the life sentence, they reach another point when they abandon problem behaviour and begin pursuing more constructive activity. Still, in all cases, the prison subcultural code imposes expectations for behaviour on Lifers. There is seldom, an expectation imposed on Lifers to become violent or involved in use of drugs or alcohol in prison. There is, however, an expectation that they continue to respect the prison code, regardless of any changes they make in their prison activity.

The next stage of Lofland's model, developing affective bonds, was discussed with Lifers in terms of friendships. It was discovered that Lifers restrict their association to other Lifers. This helps to reconcile problems most of them have with becoming friends with short-term prisoners, who would leave prison before them. Lifers restrict their friendships to one, two, or three. Other prisoners are merely acquaintances.

Developing friendships follows a strategic, lengthy process during which Lifers "test" loyalty. It was concluded that Lifers have distorted perceptions of friendships outside prison. It is not uncommon for people in free society to have only a few

"close" friends, test loyalty of those friendships, have been "burned" by friends, or take "a lot of years to get to know someone."

Considering these factors, the process of developing friendships in prison, is not extraordinary. Nevertheless, in prison, keeping social circles small is necessary to avoid interacting with "stool pigeons" or "sex offenders," and for physical safety. Initially, Lifers isolate themselves until they learn something about prospective friends, or the need for human companionship becomes overwhelming. Whether "associate" or "friend," in all cases, Lifers report having contact with at least one other prisoner. Lifers, therefore, bond with other prisoners. Lifers also bond with the prison world to the extent that they adopt without question, a code of behaviour, necessary to survive.

It was also concluded that contact with family members, or extra-institutional bonds, could not influence the conversion process. In literature related to identity transformation family influence on the conversion process is acknowledged. Family members could impose a negative or positive influence on conversion.

Assuming that Lifers' family members would attempt to circumvent the conversion process, it was concluded that such efforts would be futile, for several reasons. Visiting is restricted by prison administration to approximately five hours per day and is carried on in the presence of guards, other

prisoners and their families. Further, Lifers do not communicate information about the prison environment to their families. As a result, family members are not likely aware that identity conversion is at stake.

Geographical distance results in sporadic, inconsistent visiting, leaving Lifers to interact more often with other prisoners. In some cases, Lifers' family members instructed them on how to live in prison. Although the visiting relationship was not investigated at length, Callaghan (1985) informs this research of the potential for family members engaging in illegal behaviour with prisoners, such as transporting contraband or, visitors themselves becoming institutionalized. Considering all factors, it is concluded that extra-institutional bonds could have little or no impact on a conversion process.

In the final stage, Lofland found that individuals must engage in prolonged, intensive interaction in order to achieve negotiated identity, or conversion. Lifers frequently reported keeping to themselves, especially when they first arrived in the institution. As time passes, out of necessity, they begin to interact with others. Selective interaction helps Lifers to physically protect themselves, and avoid being caught interacting with disreputable prisoners (stool pigeons, sex offenders). Further, becoming good friends with someone obliged them to intercept a fight, jeopardizing their own safety. As a result, they limit interaction.

Some Lifers reported learning the prison rules through non-

verbal forms of interaction. By watching the actions of others and listening to other prisoners, Lifers learned the rules of the prison environment. Others learned through formal instruction in prison, by family members, or more frequently, in detention centres. Either verbally or non-verbally, Lifers share information about the prison environment, and prescriptions for proper behaviour. Further, the fact that friendships eventually develop, suggests that interaction with other prisoners does occur.

Standing up to an aggressor represented the only significant form of negotiated identity among Lifers. Altercasting was not found to be a significant method of reshaping Lifer's identity. Eventually, through interaction Lifers adopt a manner of living tailored for the prison environment and live in that environment for long periods of time.

According to Chang (1980), Greil and Rudy (1983) and Lofland (1977) conversion was deemed to have occurred when pre-converts accept standards imposed on them by the group or organization and come to see themselves, as others [converts] see them. In Murphy, Waldorf and Reinarman (1990), when cocaine dealers recognized that others viewed them as dealers, they came to see themselves as dealers. Murphy et al. note,

> They found themselves transformed from someone who has a good connection to someone who is a good connection, and they gradually came to accept the identity of dealer as part of their selves. (1990,341)

Murphy et al. also found that customers began treating dealers like a salesperson, expecting them to be available to

take calls and do business. When dealers were faced with these demands, they internalized the "dealer" identity.

The extent to which Lifers, especially those new to the prison environment, were treated as convicts by Lifers and short-timers, was not investigated in depth in this research. As such, an important segment of the conversion process may have been overlooked. Regardless of their experience with living in prison, Lifers generally reject the notion that their identity has been reshaped or modified. Some claim to have recognized changes from the moment they entered prison. For other Lifers, "convict" or "prisoner" identity was added to their stock of pre-existing identities.

When discussing plans for release the potential problem one might experience finding employment on release is often overlooked. Further, most Lifers underestimate the amount of time it might take to re-establish themselves in an apartment, a job, and a relationship. This is perhaps a result of living in a condensed, shrunken version of society for long periods of time. Still, others are more realistic and appear satisfied to begin their reintegration with semi- or unskilled labour.

When describing experiences with their first ETA, Lifers often report feeling "different" or like "convicts" during their interaction in the outside world. Also, they report feeling conspicuous because they are escorted by guards, even though guards and Lifers are dressed in street clothes. Others report difficulty in crowds because people bump into them, something

that would have detrimental results in prison. On subsequent passes however, Lifers learn to relax in the community and intimidation with the street diminishes. They recognize that anti-social rules and mannerisms they adopt in prison are not compatible with the street and will have to be abandoned.

Throughout the research, it was apparent that Lifers separate themselves from a "convict" or "inmate" world, and fail to identify themselves as convicts. They assign a different meaning to the prison subculture than is present in the literature. To Lifers, the prison subculture is a subculture of violence and use of contraband. Individuals who engage in such behaviour are the "convicts" or "inmates." Recognizing that their eventual release is contingent on "model prisoner" behaviour, Lifers resist violence and contraband use. Even after living in prison for a long time, and learning and conforming to the norms of the prison environment, which demand that prisoners mind their own business, never back down to an aggressor, and maintain an image of toughness, Lifers believe they have not become "convicts" or "inmates." Frequently they reminded the researcher, "I am a Lifer."

## CHAPTER 13

### Conclusions

This research was undertaken with the hope of discovering how a lengthy prison sentence produces a change in the identity of individuals serving life sentences. It was reasoned that if university, marriage, armed services, and vocational careers can change people, how is it possible that serving long sentences in prison will not produce irrevocable, observable changes that can be recognized and documented?

During the review of existing literature relating to the prison experience, researchers frequently reported that "criminal" or "convict" self-identification occurs during lengthy incarceration. The majority of the research, however, failed to find and/or document the impact of long term incarceration which ex-convicts and logic dictate, must occur. It was expected, through face-to-face interviews with Lifers, using a social interaction model of identity transformation as a guideline, a more complete description of the prison experience as it impacts on individual identity would be produced. However, a process of induction into the prison environment and manifestation of a unique identity has not been demonstrated.

Like other researchers, the data produced is useful and interesting. Some is unrelated to usual prisonization theories present in prison research. Still, a clear, recognizable sequence which changes individuals and leads to manifestation of a discrete "convict" identity is missing. This is true,

notwithstanding certain findings which support the presence of convict identity and Lofland's model of identity transformation.

Throughout the research a problem of separating Lifer/convict identity exists, even though it is clear that they are two different identities. Lifers reject "convict," or "inmate" identification. To them, "inmates" are those engaged in violence and use of contraband. Even though Lifers live in a convict environment, and acknowledge "knowing the score," [the prison subcultural code], they reject convict identity and repeatedly reaffirm their status as "Lifers."

Lifers live in the same anti-social world as convicts, for long periods of time. Constantly "watching your back," ignoring violent altercations, "settling a score," and mistrust, among individuals who engage in frequent interaction, are prescriptions for living in prison which are incompatible with the outside world. When Lifers act with indifference towards seeing "twenty guys get killed" in prison, "blunting" their emotions, and "becoming really hard" in order to survive, it is tempting to conclude that convict identity has manifested. Still, the Lifer identity prevails.

Lifers' rejection of a convict identity, despite admission of their compliance with prison subcultural rules and behaviour supporting convict status, begs the question, "What is a Lifer?" In fact, during the research, it was discovered that the Lifer identity is the highest status a person can have in prison. It is a status, or identity that is accepted by both short-time

prisoners and Lifers, without question. Lifers are serving the highest sentence possible -- life in a federal penitentiary -- for the ultimate, violent crime of killing another person. Notwithstanding the sentence and the crime, they regard themselves as "better" than others who are serving time for sex offences, robbery, drug dealing, or theft. Is it because they cannot do anything worse than killing someone? What kind of distortion is it, that being a Lifer is the highest status one can have? Whatever the reasons, Lifers respect their achieved status, and have the respect other convicts. They maintain this respected, undisputed status for a long period of time.

Investigation focusing specifically on the "Lifer" identity is therefore warranted. Since "Lifer" status is a conferred status, the "Lifer" identity might be difficult to study as a process of conversion. Still, certain dynamics are at play in the prison environment which serve to reinforce and perpetuate the Lifer identity, for example, the fear attributed to them by short-time prisoners. Studying "Lifer" identity specifically might produce a more thorough separation of the "Lifer/convict" identity.

It has been suggested that considering individual perspectives is important in conversion to convict identity. Given that Lifer identity is a conferred status and embraced by Lifers, and the amount of time Lifers live with this identity, considering individual perspectives and variations of pre-custodial lifestyles whe studying "Lifer" identity is less

important. In this research, individual perspectives as illustrative of a distinct, uniform conversion process may have circumvented findings in this research. Some Lifers were experienced with prison from previous sentences. Others were allied with a deviant subculture, such as bikers, and career criminals. In some cases, the prison world compared closely to the life they led on the outside. Attempting to locate a unique identity among these Lifers, as a result of lengthy incarceration is, perhaps, futile. Conversion to a "Lifer" as opposed to a "convict" identity is possible regardless of pre-custodial lifestyle.

Learning and eventual commitment to the prison subcultural code, was deemed to be an indicator of identity conversion in this research. To Lifers, the prison code means only "rules" for living in prison. At first, these rules represented a means of physical safety. As their sentence progresses, Lifers learn that the stature of the life sentence is enough to protect them in prison. As such, the significance of these subcultural rules, for Lifers, can be minimized. At no time, did they acknowledge coming to see themselves as a convict, by learning and living by the rules of the prison environment. Future research should consider the priority Lifers assign to the prison rules as a prescription for survival.

Other incidents which take place in prison should also be incorporated into a model of identity conversion among Lifers. In the data for this study Lifers' refer to the presence of "sex

offenders," "rape hounds," and "drag queens" in prison populations. Considering the presence of "drag queens" and "rape hounds" in the prison population, the fact that prisoners have few choices in prison, and must have to make some kind of adjustment to satisfy sexual desires, sexual activity and/or victimization is bound occur in Canadian prisons and form a recognized part of inmate culture. Still, Lifers were silent on the subject.

Canadian literature related to the prison environment is also silent on the issue of sexual activity and victimization. Such incidents have been documented and linked to convict identity in American literature (see Bowker 1980), the adoption of aggressive behaviour in prison, and the potential for problem behaviour on release. Given these implications for post-release behaviour, lack of attention to this issue in Canadian research is bewildering.

Since Lifers are feared by other prisoners and the stature of their sentence commands a significant amount of respect, incidents of sexual victimization, or any other form of physical violence, instigated by other prisoners against Lifers is remote. As such, the impact of sexual victimization as contributing to conversion to convict identity is minimized.

Tattooing as an indicator of deep involvement in prison subculture and a unique prison identity also warrants investigation. Many Lifers who took part in this research had tattoos of vicious animals, flames, biker logos, skull and

crossbones, "grim reapers," and pornographic images of women, covering their arms and torso entirely. While tattoos provide a measure of physical protection for many prisoners, Lifers claim that tattooing merely provides an activity to fill time in prison. Furthermore, tattooing often takes place at the beginning of the life sentence, when the perceived need for physical safety is more acute. As time passes, Lifers learn that their crime and the stature of the life sentence act as safety mechanisms. As such, tattoos as they relate to prison identity among Lifers is worth investigating.

Finally, John Irwin's (1987) summary of revised, updated prison research suggests that progression to convict identity in prison has been circumvented. For example, powerful, troublesome convicts are separated from the rest of the population and treatment programs have resulted in greater communication between convicts and administration. Full immersion into the prison subculture is, therefore, circumvented.

Perhaps Lifers do avoid full immersion in the prison subculture. The identity which is attached to the violence that brought them to prison may mitigate the need for Lifers to commit to the subcultural rules as a means of survival. The perceived need for tattooing as a means of physical safety, incidents of sexual victimization, and physical violence is reduced. The respect or treatment they receive from other short-time convicts, might, therefore, prevent full immersion into the prison "convict" subculture.

Regardless of certain omissions or deficiencies in this study, the researcher still believes that Lifers have internalized an identity that will survive release from prison. This belief makes the inability to accurately document personal changes and chart a sequence of identity conversion during long-term incarceration bewildering. Perhaps, this "process" or "sequence" is concealed in the data, and not easily recognizable. Perhaps, it must be concluded, what is irritating to say, that lengthy incarceration does not have a visible and lasting impact on individuals. Is that possible? What is accomplished is different, competent research. Still, what is left unaccomplished puzzles the researcher.

SCHEDULE 1

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. How old were you at the time of this conviction?
2. How long ago was that?
3. Was this your first offence?
4. If no, how much time did you do before this conviction?

Family Background

5. Were you involved in an intimate (close) relationship with anyone before you got here?
6. What happened to that relationship since you've been inside?
7. Were there any children in this relationship or any other relationships?
8. Do you keep in contact with your partner? children?
9. How do you keep in contact with them?
10. How often do you keep in contact with them?
11. How would you describe your relationship with your family before you came to prison?
12. What's that relationship like now?

Education

13. How much schooling did you get before you started serving this sentence?
14. Have you participated in any educational programs inside?
15. What kind of education have you completed?

Employment

16. What kind of jobs did you do before prison?
17. Do you have a job in here now? What do you do?

Leisure Activities

18. What kind of things did you do in your spare time before you started serving this sentence? (hobbies, sports)
19. What kind of groups or organizations did you belong to before prison?
20. What do you do in here to fill your spare time?

SCHEDULE 2

Differences between early and late identities

Turning Points

(a) Admission

1. What was it like for you when you first got here? What kind of things happened to you the first week you were here?
2. Can you tell me about anything nice that's happened to you since you got here?
3. What was the most unpleasant or upsetting thing that happened to you since you got here?
4. Can you tell me how you felt about this experience?
5. Do you think this upsetting experience will be important later on in your life? If so, how?

(b) Restricted Mobility

6. Have you been out on any kind of pass or TA since you got here?
7. If yes, what was that like for you?
8. What restrictions are placed on your daily activities in here?
9. What activities can you take part in by choice?
   What about the other guys?
10. Can you tell me what a day is like for you in here? How much freedom do you have to choose your own friends and activities?

(c) Assimilation into the Prison Subculture

11. Do you have to do anything different to get along than you did on the outside?
12. What was the biggest difference you had to get used to in prison?

(d) Colonization

13. What's your cell like?
14. Do they let you have your own things?
15. What things of your own do you have in your cell?

Affective Bonds

16. How did you feel toward the other men when you first got here?
17. How do you feel now?
18. Did you develop any new friendships?
19. What kind of leisure activities do you participate in, with others?
20. Do you get along well with the other guys?
21. What kind of guys don't you like?
22. Do you belong to any of the Lifers' groups in here?
23. Do you think the guys in this group are better friends than the ones who don't belong to the group?

24. What kind of changes have you noticed about yourself since you joined this group? What about the other guys?

Cessation of Extra-Institutional Bonds

25. What about keeping in touch with your family? What's that like?
26. Do they visit or write to you? How often?
27. What do you tell them about the joint?
28. What kind of things do they talk to you about?
29. What about the other guys? Do they have many visitors?

Intensive Interaction

30. Do you talk to the other guys much or do you keep mostly to yourself?
31. Are there any guys who just avoid others and don't talk?
32. What do you think causes some of the guys to keep to themselves?
33. What kind of things did the other guys talk to you about when you first got here?
34. Can you tell me how you responded to some of the things they said to you?
35. What do you talk about now?

SCHEDULE 3

## AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

Purpose of the Research

To examine experiences of Lifers during long-term incarceration and their involvement (or non-involvement) with the Life Line/In-Reach program.

I am doing research at the University of Windsor on Lifers' experience with long-term incarceration and the Life Line/In-Reach program, and I need your help.

Your participation is voluntary and will involve one face-to-face interview with me. The interview will take about 1 to 1 1/2 hours. You will be asked to answer several questions. You have the option, at all times during the interview, to end the interview or refuse to answer any question which you are not comfortable with. Your name will not be recorded, except for your agreement to participate so that I may contact you and a Consent, which you will be asked to sign at the beginning of the interview. The information you give me will be written down by hand and no tape recording device will be used. Your participation in this study will not affect your eligibility for parole and no one but the interviewer will have access to the information you provide. Your identity will be disguised in all written material. The results of the study will be made available to you, if you wish through the Life Line/In-Reach workers. You may also ask any questions you have about the research before, during or after the interview.

You can indicate your willingness to participate by writing your name at the bottom of this form. Please keep one copy for yourself and return the other copy to

_____.

I look forward to your possible participation in this study.

Leslie E. Macchio
University of Windsor

I _____(please print clearly) have read the above statements and agree to participate in this study, under the conditions stated above.

_____
Signature of Participant

_____
Date

SCHEDULE 4

## WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

Purpose of the Research

To examine experiences of Lifers during long-term incarceration and their involvement (or non-involvement) with the Life Line/In-Reach program.

I am presently serving a life sentence at Penitentiary/Institution. I have been asked to participate in an interview and I am aware that this interview will investigate my experience as a Lifer and with the Life Line/In-Reach program. I understand that the interviewer will be analyzing the information I provide in order to develop a better understanding of the experiences of long term inmates.

The interview process has been explained to me and I have been assured that my name will never be used in written materials or oral presentations. I have further been advised that the information I provide will be recorded by handwriting no one but the interviewer will have access to the information. I have been advised that the presentation of any written material will disguise my identity and my participation in this study will not affect my eligibility for parole.

I am aware that I may withdraw from the interview at any time and I may withdraw my consent to have certain information used, providing I notify the interviewer immediately after the interview is completed. I may also refuse to answer any questions which I am uncomfortable with.

If I have any questions concerning this study, I may contact Tom French or Russ Elliott, the Life Line/In-Reach workers, who will advise the researcher's Chairperson of my concerns or questions.

I _____ (please print clearly) have read the above statements and agree to participate as an interviewee under the conditions stated above.

_____
Signature of Participant

_____
Date

## GLOSSARY

**bits**: short provincial or federal sentences;

**CSC**: Correctional Services of Canada;

**canteen**: a place in prison where prisoners can purchase personal hygiene and confection items, and cigarettes;

**cascading**: transferring through the federal enitentiary system from maximum to medium and eventually minimum security;

**classification**: assessing security risk such as high, medium or low risk;

**cliques**: groups of prisoners who associate on the basis of shared pre-custodial cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic or subcultural status;

**cons [convicts]**: federal/provincial prisoners; according to Lifers a "con" is a prisoner being held in custody against her/his will but will serve time constructively in order to gain timely release;

**contraband**: substances such as drugs and/or alcohol which are illegal in prison cool guys non-violent prisoners who will not harrass other prisoners, but give the impression of strength and live up to an image of toughness;

**day parole**: a form of conditional release for Lifers nearing full parole eligibility, usually from minimum security to accommodate work obligations and facilitate reintegration; Lifers are expected to return or report to the institution at designated times;

**do the time**: serving time constructively by becoming involved in prison programs, vocational and academic activities and minding the prison subcultural rules;

**doing time**: serving time in prison;

**drag queens**: homosexuals; also prisoners undergoing or who have undergone sex change;

**escorted temporary absence**: a form of conditional release for Lifers, usually after one-third of their sentence has been served; ETAs are granted at three month intervals for six hours; Lifers, under supervision of a guard, can meet friends or family for social and recreational activities;

**full parole**: parole, at eligibility date, to a half-way house without obligation to return or report to the institution;

**goof**: similar to the slang "street" definition of someone considered "stupid" or "silly." Calling someone a "goof" in prison can however, invite physical assaults from other prisoners;

**hustling for contraband**: soliciting illegal substances such as drugs and/or alcohol from other prisoners or visitors;

**inmates**: also federal and/or provincial prisoners; in contrast to "cons," according to Lifers, inmates do not consider themselves being held in custody against their will and are usually the "troublemakers" in prison, given their inevitable release at warrant expiry;

**joint**: prison;

**judicial review**: after 15 years have been served, usually on a Life-25 sentence, Lifers can apply for judicial review; in an adversarial forum, and in the presence of a judge and jury, a case is presented, based on a Lifer's instituional record, vocational, academic, and substance abuse programs undertaken in prison, a consistent, positive of attitude, and constructive change in behavior, for a reduction in the number of years which must be served before eligibility for parole;

**kite**: letters, memos;

**Life-25**: the sentence, a mandatory life sentence where 25 years must be served before eligibility for parole, imposed on individuals convicted of first-degree murder;

**lifers group**: a group designed for Lifers only, used as a forum for disseminating information of particular interest to Lifers and to plan special events for Lifers;

**lock-down**: confinement to cells and/or cell blocks for extended periods of time, until the aftermath of a riot, stabbing, beating or piping is resolved;

**maximum security**: prisons where rigid control is imposed on prisoners mobility throughout the institution; passes outside the prison are usually not granted except for emergency medical treatment and prisoners can be confined to cells and cell blocks for up to 23 1/2 hours per day;

**medium security**: in medium security, prisoners are given more freedom of mobility throughout the institution; passes may be required to leave work or school to visit relatives, and meet with case management or lawyers; escorted temporary absences are administered from minimum security; as long as work obligations are met during the day, evenings are free for studying, attending substance abuse programs and taking part in recreational

activities;

**minimum security**: prisoners are granted unrestricted mobility throughout the institution; ETAs, UTAs, and day parole are administered from minimum security;

**rape hounds**: prisoners who are serving time for a sex offence against a woman or child;

**reception**: ordinarily located in maximum security; in reception, prisoners being admitted into the institution undergo administrative procedures such as assigning institutional clothing and numbers, fingerprinting, photographing, and classification;

**screws**: guards;

**short time**: prisoners serving less than a life sentence; Lifers nearing parole eligibility are also on "short time";

**street**: the social environment outside prison;

**stool pigeons**: prisoners who inform to other prisoners and/or administration;

**telephone pole structure**: a prison design where administrative offices and cell blocks are perpendicular to a centre hall or "strip;"

**tough guys**: prisoners who use strength, physical appearance (tattoos; muscles), threats and violence as a means of intimidation;

**trash**: gossip about other prisoners and/or administration;

**unescorted temporary absence**: a form of conditional release usually absence granted to prisoners in minimum security for 72 hour periods, without supervision; UTAs are ordinarily granted to prisoners nearing day parole eligibility and spent with family members, with a view to facilitating reintegration;

**walkout**: a method of protesting circumstances of confinement, such as arbitrary administrative practices; prisoners will congregate and "walk out" of the institution into the yard, collectively;

**warrant**: authorization or certificate of the Court granting correctional authorities leave to hold an individual in custody for the duration of a sentence; prisoners can be released prior to serving the full sentence based on "good time"; release before warrant expiry is not applicable to Lifers;

**warrant expiry**: the point at which a prisoner has served the entire length of the sentence imposed by the Court and is entitled to be released unconditionally; reserved for prisoners serving short sentences; warrant expiry is not applicable to Lifers;

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## VITA AUCTORIS

Leslie Ellen Macchio was born and raised in Toronto, Ontario. She moved to Leamington, Ontario with her family in 1969 and received her Secondary School diploma from Kingsville District High School in 1973.

In 1991 Leslie received her Honours B.A. in Criminology at The University of Windsor.

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